

ALFRED

MARCH 50¢ K

# HITCHCOCK'S

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE



**NEW** stories  
presented by  
the master  
of **SUSPENSE**

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March 1968

Dear Reader:

If we may correlate a dog's age to that of man, it occurred to me that months of the year can be aged similarly as an indication of what to expect, weather-wise and crime-wise.

Allowing an age of six for each month, we personify March, for example, at age 18—capricious, troubled. June is 36—stable, but anxious to get on with it. September, at 54, is mellow but given to fits of temper. December, an aged 72, is liable for anything or nothing.

However, nature and vice being what they are, I fear this will not go beyond the stage of being a mere clue to behavior—just as age is with people . . .

While advance knowledge of what transpires herein is prudently restricted and the reader is kept in suspense, there is coincident instruction on gypsy life, zoology, farmers' daughters, nice old ladies, little pitchers with big ears, Chinatown, invisible roomers and sculpture, among others.

Many more enlightening subjects will continue to be unobtrusively offered in the coming months, so obtain your registration forms on either Page 99 or 160. You will never be late for class.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE** Vol. 13, No. 3, March 1968. Single copies 50 cents. Subscriptions \$6.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$7.00 (in U.S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 2441 Beach Court, Riviera Beach, Fla. 33404. Publications office, 10 Ferry Street, Concord, N. H. 03302. Second class postage paid at Concord, N. H. Copyright H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 1968. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts if return is desired but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited material. Manuscripts and changes of addresses should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 2441 Beach Court, Riviera Beach, Fla. 33404. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A.

*If one ever visits Torremolinos, he may wish to search out a certain café and meet the new owner.*



by  
**Stephen  
Marlowe**

**T**HE SIGN outside, in big white letters, said *Pepe's*. That much, in keeping with the geography, was Spanish, but the rest of the place was Greenwich Village with maybe a little Soho thrown in.

The canned music, as I opened the door and entered the dim interior, was a beatnik caterwaul. The

waiters all wore tight white duck trousers, scarlet shirts tied at the waist, and peroxidized hair. A drunk in the corner, wearing a Hemingway beard, a baseball cap, and a pair of steel-rimmed glasses low on the bridge of his nose, was shouting something about a bull-fighter. Three limp-wristed types at the bar were discussing the war in Viet Nam in disparaging terms. A girl, not quite drunk, sat on the end stool fiddling with a pair of castanets and saying "olé" over and over again without spirit.

She wasn't the girl I was looking for. Nobody paid any attention to her, or to me, Chester Drum, until I hoisted myself up on a stool and said, "Pepe."

"Not here," one of the peroxide boys told me. "You're drinking?" "Beer."

"One cerveza coming up."

He plunked the bottle and a glass down in front of me, and a chit that said I owed Pepe sixty pesetas, muchas gracias. Sixty pesetas is a dollar. Pepe is the diminutive of José, which is Joseph in Spanish. The girl I was looking for was living here in Torremolinos, in the south of Spain, with an American expatriate named Joe Cummings.

I said, "Señor Cummings charges a lot of dough for a bottle of beer."

The peroxide boy shrugged.

"You can always do your drinking elsewhere, amigo. We got class. You pay for class."

". . . simply so awful I hardly knew what to say," one of the limp-wristed set whined.

". . . madman with a cape," pontificated the man with the Hemingway beard, "but did anyone ever see him do a single decent *natural* to the left?" He was talking to himself.

The girl at the end of the bar went on clicking her castanets.

A bad Spanish imitation of the Beatles took over on the canned music.

I finished my beer. "When do you expect him?"

"Pepe?"

"Pepe," I said.

"He comes and he goes."

"I'll wait," I said.

Waiting earned me another beer and another one of Pepe's IOU's. It was swell beer.

An old man wearing one of those electric blue work jackets you see all over Spain, a pair of dirty white ducks and a beret came by sweeping the floor with a twig-broom. He was dark enough to be a gypsy, and he was the only Spaniard in the joint.

The door opened and a guy wearing the red and white team colors strolled in. He was big and his blond hair was no peroxide job.



He had wide-spaced, mean-looking eyes and a complexion as pink and soft as a baby's bottom. Still he managed to look tough.

He slapped the old man's back. "Glad to see you're minding the store, partner," he said in English, and laughed, and went around to the business side of the bar.

"No comprendo," the old man said contemptuously.

The big blond guy moved down the bar to where the girl sat alone with her castanets. "You're drunk, Fran," he said. "I told you not to hang around here when you're drunk."

"I had a few," she protested.

"I say you're drunk. The Guardia could lift my license on me."

"I am not drunk."

"Beat it," he told her.

She stared at him with inebriated defiance.

"Drinks are on me," he said with a small smile, picking up her chits and tearing them in half. "Now blow."

"Well, in that case," she said, and lurched toward the door and through it. The three limp-wristed types snickered.

The peroxide boy whispered something to the big blond guy, and he came over to me. "You wanted something special?"

"Pepe? Joe Cummings?"

"So?"

"Joyce Addams," I said quietly. "Never heard of her." The wide-spaced eyes narrowed.

"You got together in San Sebastián a couple of months ago," I said slowly. "You stayed at the Hotel Plaza in Madrid for the Festival of San Isidro. You drove down here by way of Granada, and she's been here ever since."

"Sorry, wrong number," Joe Cummings said.

"Her father hired me to bring her back to Geneva, no questions asked," I said. "She goes to the university there."

He laughed. "Been cutting a lot of classes, hasn't she?"

"No questions asked," I repeated.

"Better check with the operator," he said. "Or hey, have you thought of the Yellow Pages? They're full of dames who want a free ride in the south of Spain or the south of anywhere."

The three limp-wristed types, who had been listening, snickered again.

"This is the part that hurts," I said, "because ordinarily I wouldn't do it this way. I've got a blank check of her old man's in my pocket. It's yours, filled in with a reasonable figure, if she drives back with me tonight, and that's the end of it."

"What's a reasonable figure?" he



asked, now showing some interest.

"I thought you never heard of her."

"I'm just curious."

"It could go as high as a grand," I said. My client, who was loaded, worked for an American government agency in Geneva, had his eye on a big political appointment and couldn't afford adverse publicity, had told me I could go as high as five thousand.

"Okay. I heard your pitch. I don't know your pigeon. Now get lost."

"You're making a mistake," I said.

"I'll take it up with my tax accountant."

He didn't offer to pay for my drinks. I paid and went out the door into the plaza that was lighted as bright as day. If he wanted to do it the hard way I'd go along with him. Torremolinos had grown from a fishing village to a jet-set watering place, but that still didn't make it any big city. I decided I could find Joyce Addams without any help from the guy she was keeping house for, but I didn't like it. Her old man had insisted on no fuss and no publicity. Well, she was his daughter.

"Señor."

I turned around. The old Spaniard who had been sweeping the floor of Pepe's was behind me.

"You will continue to walk," he said. "Turn at the first street to the right. It is dark. Then we can talk."

I followed his instructions. The street was dark all right. It smelled of charcoal, garlic, and the sea. I heard the old man's shuffling footsteps. "The señorita," he said in Spanish, "every day she cries. She wishes to go home."

"Then why doesn't she?"

"He will not allow it."

"Where is she?"

The old man said nothing.

I sighed. "All right, how much?"

The old man spat on the pavement. "Nada. For nada, señor. I only wish to know that you are the man who can do it."

I saw no way I could establish that fact. "Her father thought so," I said. "He sent me over a thousand kilometers to find her."

"A thousand kilometers," the old man said musingly, and I realized I had said exactly the right thing. "It is like the other end of the world. He must have much faith in you."

"Where can I find his daughter?"

The old man's thoughts were elsewhere. "His partner," he said. "I am his partner. It must be so as no foreigner can commence a business in Spain otherwise. But he treats me like dirt. You have seen?"



And of course the money all goes to him. Yet should the Guardia Civil learn of his various enterprises, señor, I too would be punished."

"Where is she?"

"That also is her problem. She knows, so he cannot let her go. Sooner would he kill her. That is clear, señor. Every day she cries. Every night."

I said nothing.

He walked away from me and then came back. A match flared and he was smoking. "A thousand kilometers," he said. "The father must have great faith in you. You are norteamericano also?"

I said I was an American.

He let out a long breath. "In the old days, before this of the *bodega* called Pepe's, I worked as a gardener in my village of Churriana, in the mountains. The Americans who stayed there were always good to me. Sí, sí, they were. It meant much to me. But the one who calls himself Pepe, he is an abomination."

"Then help me," I said.

He was going to, of course, or he wouldn't have followed me, but he had to wait for anger to trigger courage. I waited with him. Finally he said, "With the gypsies. On the beach. You walk down the Calle San Miguel to the mill tower, and follow the steps down to

the water. There you will see caves where the gypsies live. Ask for the *gitano* named Rafael. And you understand as well that we never spoke?"

I said I understood.

"Then vaya con dios, hombre."

His footsteps shuffled away. He was gone.

Caves pockmarked the sandstone face of the cliff. Outside each one a cook-fire was smouldering to ash. Along with the sea breeze I smelled frying fish and saffron and olive oil. A high tenor voice shouted a flamenco lament at the dark sky. There was no moon but the stars were bright.

Half-seen gypsies directed me to the cave of Rafael. They were just shadows in the night, and they wanted to stay that way, but as I passed I left excited whispers in my wake. It wasn't every day, and sure as hell not every night, that the gypsies had visitors.

A pregnant woman was frying fish in a pan outside Rafael's cave. The olive oil splattered, and she drew a hand back from it. She looked up at me with dark, steady eyes. Large gold earrings swung from the lobes of her ears. In the firelight her face was dark and seamed, but still drawn tight like old parchment over the fine bone structure. I decided she once had

been pretty. Gypsies, particularly gypsy women, age fast.

"I'm looking for Rafael," I said in Spanish.

"There is no one here who calls himself that, señor."

"How do you call yourself?"

"I have no name."

"Whose cave is this then?"

"The cave of my man," she admitted grudgingly.

"Does he have a name?"

"Yes."

"Rafael?"

"Go away, señor."

The gypsies are secretive, and their lives are weighted down with superstitions ten centuries old. To know the name of a gypsy, if you are a stranger, is to have power over him.

"Tell Rafael I came from Pepe. Pepe, the norteamericano."

She took the large pan of fish off the fire, set it on a rock and disappeared barefoot into the cave. I lit a cigarette and waited.

In a few minutes she was back. She replaced the pan on the fire. Right away the olive oil began to sizzle. She sat hunkered down near it like an Indian squaw.

She said, very softly, "Is it the girl?"

"What about the girl?" I said.

"You will take her away? Señor Pepe wants her back?"

"Maybe," I said.

"It would be well, señor," she said. "The girl does not belong here."

"Why doesn't she leave?"

The woman looked up at me. "Have care, señor," she said slowly. "You do not come from Pepe if you ask that."

I realized I had made a mistake, and then I wasn't so sure. The gypsy woman said, "Take the girl and go then, with my blessings. But have care." She got up suddenly and grasped the lapels of my jacket. "Every day it is more. The way my man looks at her, the way he must touch her every chance he gets—I know what he is thinking. I know what it is he wants." Her hands dropped to her belly, that was big with child. "I have this. Always I have this. Tell my man that you are from Pepe, as you told me. You are an *estranjero*, otherwise what would you be doing here? Then take the girl and go."

I started toward the entrance to the cave.

"I do not want to be responsible for killing her," the woman said to my back.

The walls were rough-hewn, but there were old, almost threadbare carpets on the floor. The light of candles revealed a few battered old chairs, a table, even an armoire. I heard a baby crying somewhere.

Low doorways with curtains hanging across them led to other rooms. I was in an apartment carved from the soft sandstone of the cliff.

"Anybody home?" I said brightly in English.

A curtain parted and a man came out. He was wearing rags, and he was filthy. He hadn't shaved in a week. His skin was gypsy-dark and his eyes, sunk deep in a narrow skull, were shrewd and calculating. As he approached me I began to smell him.

"The girl," I said curtly. "Where is she?"

He shrugged one shoulder. It was more like a twitch.

"Come on, come on," I said then in Spanish. "Where is she?"

"You are from Señor Pepe?"

"Of course not," I snapped at him. "The Guardia Civil sent me."

He opened his mouth and revealed three yellow fangs. A sound emerged. I realized he was laughing. He jerked a large and dirty thumb toward the curtain behind him. He made the sound that he thought was laughter again. "That is good," he said. "The Guardia."

I passed through the curtain and saw Joyce Addams.

She was sitting on the edge of a bare mattress and wearing a skirt and blouse that had seen better days. A candle burned on a table near the bed. She pouted at me, the

same sulky and spoiled pout that I knew from the picture I carried in my wallet. She was a lithe little brunette, twenty years old, very pretty, and at the moment trying to affect a go-to-hell look in her eyes but she was scared blue.



"I don't know you, do I?" she said quickly. "I guess I don't recognize you without the peroxide job. I'm not much good at recognizing Pepe's boys without their peroxide jobs. It's good for business, he says. It gets the swish trade of which there is gobs in

Torremolinos, he says. You can't tell one of Pepe's boys without . . ." She began to cry.

"Who has your passport?" I asked. "Pepe or the gypsy?"

"What? My passport?"

"Your father sent me. I'm getting you out of here."

She was still crying. I patted her shoulder and made comforting sounds. I felt awkward.

She blew her nose, hard. She looked up at me and put on the brittle act again, or tried to. Her voice broke a couple of times as she spoke. "Pepe has it. Trust Pepe to know how to turn a buck. After he kills me he'll sell it. Doctored, of course. You can get a thousand dollars for a valid American passport."

"I'll remember that for when I go broke," I said. "Why should he want to kill you?"

She gave me an impatient look, as if my not knowing her life was in danger was somehow denigrating. Then her eyes opened wide and fixed on something over my shoulder. I started to turn, but the room was small and the gypsy Rafael was both quiet on his feet and very fast, and what I did was turn toward something that smashed against the side of my head.

The candle guttered, or maybe it was just me. Whatever happened, I

was in no condition to question.

A voice said, "His name is Chester Drum. He's a private detective licensed to operate in—"

Another voice cut that one off. "I can read. Hand it over." The second voice belonged to Joe Cummings.

I opened an eye and saw a ceiling the way a ceiling looks when you are very young and have been on a carousel too long. I shut the eye.

"There's water if you want," Joyce Addams said.

I touched my head and brought away a sticky hand. I swung my legs to the side of the bare mattress, where someone had thoughtfully deposited me, got them over the side and leaned toward the floor with my head between my knees. After a while I lurched to my feet and made it to the curtain hanging in the doorway. I pulled the curtain aside. Joe Cummings and one of the peroxide boys and the gypsy were out there. Cummings had my wallet. He gave it to the peroxide boy. He was preparing to leave.

"See you later," he said to no one in particular. "About midnight?"

The gypsy, in English that would have won no elocution prizes but still English, said, "Mid-

night, sure. What about the girl?"

"Both of them," Cummings said.

"Got you, boss," the gypsy Rafael said, not liking it, and I knew how I had been made so fast. Who would have thought the gypsy understood English?

Cummings looked at me, grinning. "I saw my tax accountant," he said, and went out. The peroxidé boy pointed a gun at me. It was a Luger. "You get to go back inside with sweetie-pie," he said.

I let the curtain drop.

"It's crazy," Joyce Addams said in what for her was a subdued voice.

She cleaned my blood-matted hair with a damp cloth. I sat back on the mattress felling sick but not moribund, smoking a cigarette and staring up through the smoke at the rough-hewn stone ceiling.

"I mean," she said, "everything was so predictable. I'd finish school, and there was this boy back home, my father liked him, he's going to be a lawyer, but he's so damned stuffy. I just couldn't stand it, really. Everything was all mapped out for me. I didn't like school anyway. I'm not very good at school. I took off."

"You took off," I said.

"Hitchhiking south, complete with rucksack. After a few days I wound up in Spain. San Sebastián? I was never in Spain before."

"San Sebastián," I said. "Where you met Pepe."

"I was in a bar, alone. I shouldn't have been, not a girl, not in Spain. They began to make a fuss. Joe came along and after that it was all right. I was feeling wild and free, you know? I mean, in New York or Geneva I never would have let myself get picked up at a bar. It's why I ran away, I guess."

She looked away from me. "I went back to Joe's hotel with him. I never—"

"Look," I said, "save it. You don't have to tell me the story of your life."

She didn't hear me, or didn't want to hear me. "I was smashed, really smashed. I didn't even know what I was doing. Joe saw to that. Spanish brandy all night. Boy, that Fundador. Anyway—"

"You stayed with him. You came down here. Okay. How did it begin to go sour?"

"I was drunk, off and on, mostly on, till we got here. It was my revolt with a capital R. You know? Just the opposite of the life I'd led."

"What you needed was a low type. Joe is a low type. I get you."

"You don't have to be cynical. You don't understand me at all."

"Your father didn't pay me to understand you."

"Sometimes you sound just like him. My father."

"Look, Joyce," I said patiently, "the sooner you tell me what kind of trouble you're in, the sooner—"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. You're not even listening."

"I mean right here. Right now. Joe's going to kill you, you said. I want to know why."

"I'm getting to it."

I looked at my watch. It was eleven-thirty. "Get to it now."

"I guess I came to my senses. I mean, if I didn't want to lead the kind of life my father had in mind, that didn't mean I had to—well, you know. I had an argument with Joe. I said I was leaving and he said he couldn't care less. That didn't bother me—much. A clean break and all, you know. But then Joe said I was going just the way I came—one skirt, two blouses, a pair of jeans and the rucksack on my back. I started getting mad.

"I followed him that night, after Pepe's closed. I don't know why. I was curious. He was always spending half the night somewhere. He went to the beach. There was a boat. A bunch of gypsies began unloading things, wooden crates. They took them up the beach to a truck. One of the cases dropped on the rocks and broke open. It was full of cameras."

"Sure," I said, "and maybe the

others had automotive parts and Swiss watches and like that."

Her eyes widened. "How did you know?"

"Spain's a smuggler's paradise," I said. "They get the contraband in Gibraltar and sell it on the black market here."

"I went right up to Joe and said if he didn't at least give me air fare back to Geneva, I was going to snitch on him. He got real mad. 'You shouldn't have seen this,' he said. 'You shouldn't have said that.'"

"One of the gypsies wanted to kill me on the spot. He had this big knife and he kept looking at it and looking at me. But Joe shook his head, no. He said there was no hurry. He took me here and talked to me. He said, 'Look at the position you put me in. You can blow the whistle on me any old time, can't you?' I was scared, but I was still mad. I've got this temper, you know? I said it was for me to know and him to find out if I ever told on him. It's crazy, but it was almost like a game, arguing with Joe like that here in the cave. Finally he said, 'Okay, baby, you asked for it,' and went away. That was last week. They haven't let me out of here since. The old man keeps looking at me and trying to paw me, and the old lady doesn't like it, and they have four children

and the old man has a gun and the only thing Joe can do is kill me. He's got to, you know?"

She sat there, watching me. She'd told it all like a small child who'd run away from home, maybe took a streetcar to the end of the line or something, and then got hungry and used her pocket money on an ice cream and then walked home and got sent to her room without any supper, tired, hungry, but proud of her exploit.

Then, when I'd said nothing, she gulped a couple of times, and the second gulp became a sob, and she said, "I'm scared. I'm so scared. I just wish it never happened, not any of it. I'm twenty, I ought to feel all grown up after what I've been through, but it was all a mistake and I feel like a little girl. Take me home. Please, you've got to take me home."

Pepe, I thought, might have his own ideas on the subject.

Midnight came and went, and then it was one o'clock, one-thirty, and pushing two.

I got up and pulled the curtain aside. The gypsy Rafael was seated at a table with a plate in front of him and fish tails on it and a gun alongside his fork. Near his right elbow stood a bottle of wine, almost empty. Rafael took a swig. He was a little drunk, but not so drunk that he didn't look up at me

and raise the gun and shake his head. I let the curtain drop.

One of the peroxide boys showed up at two-thirty. He looked tired. His white ducks were wet almost to the hips.

"All right, let's get moving," he said in a bleak voice. There aren't a whole lot of people who like to commit murder.

The boat was riding at anchor about fifty yards out in the surf. In silhouette against the starlit night it was a fair-sized cabin cruiser. Its inboard engine was throbbing powerfully. It would be a big engine, of course; big enough to outrun the Guardia patrol boats if it had to; big enough to take us a few miles out in jig time, drop us, and still make it back before dawn. Not that when it got back would be of any importance to us.

Half a dozen gypsies were hanging around, their trousers wet. They had been unloading contraband. At first their presence surprised me, and then I realized that taking Joyce Addams for a ride had probably been their idea more than Pepe's. Life is cheap in Spain and cheaper still among the gypsies, and they were hanging around to see that Pepe did what they thought had to be done. After all, it was his *mujer* who could



put the finger on them for spite. We reached the edge of the surf. It lapped up at the sand and hissed back out to sea.

One of the gypsies approached me. He said politely, "Your shoes, señor."

I just looked at him, not getting it. He smiled. It was not an unfriendly smile at all. He pointed down at his bare feet.

"Where you are going," he said, still in that polite voice, "you will need no shoes."

"What?" I said.

"But I, I need shoes. For a favor, señor?"

It hardly makes sense that you can laugh at a time like that, but I managed it as I bent down and removed my shoes. He took them from me gravely with a little bow. He tried them on and laced them. He took a few tentative steps forward and back. He began to smile. "They are a good fit. I thank you, señor."

*The Guardia*, I thought. *Maybe a Guardia foot patrol would come along the beach.* But I knew they wouldn't. Contraband runners from Gibraltar have to worry only about the patrol boats, unless they miss a payment at the local Casa Cuartel.

A voice called across the water: "What's holding you up?" It was Pepe.

Joyce came close and looked at me. She was trying hard not to cry. I was trying hard to smile. Once we were on that boat, and once it began to move, I knew we were dead.

The peroxide boy motioned with his Luger. He and the gypsy Rafael moved out into the surf with us.

When we were still about twenty feet from the boat, a figure leaned over the side and heaved up at the anchor line. It didn't have far to come. There was a slight splash and the anchor clanged on board. By then we were thigh-deep in water. The surf was gentle but the footing uncertain. Shells and sharp rocks cut into my bare feet.

Joyce stumbled. I moved toward her, but the peroxide boy waved me off. "Rafael can handle it. He likes to."

"Keep your filthy hands off me," Joyce said. The gypsy snickered.

The boat was bobbing as we neared it. Waves lapped its hull. Two figures were leaning toward us from the cockpit—Pepe and a young gypsy. I was standing up to my hips in water that reached Joyce's waist. Rafael was still holding her.

"Easy does it," Pepe said. "He comes first."

I looked at the peroxide boy. He stood just far enough away so I

couldn't go for him. He jerked the muzzle of the Luger toward the boat.

"All I came here for was the girl," I said slowly, looking up at Pepe. "Your business is your business. We could fly out of Malaga tonight."

Pepe glanced at the young gypsy, who shook his head slowly. "It's too late for that," Pepe said. "They'd cut my throat. Better come aboard."

"You're making a mistake."

"Move!"

I grabbed hold and pulled myself up over the side and into the cockpit. It was awkward work, starting in hip-deep water. Pepe got a grip on my jacket and yanked. The young gypsy on board stood nearby with another Luger, his legs planted unnecessarily wide against the slight rocking motion of the boat.

I got to my feet in the cockpit. It wasn't a huge boat, maybe a thirty-footer, and the three of us made a crowd in the small open area behind the cabin. I looked forward and saw a figure standing at the wheel with his back toward us, ready to take her out—another of the peroxide boys. I faced starboard again and saw Joyce's head, her hair drenched from her ducking, appear over the side.

Suddenly it dropped back out of

sight, and she cried out. She had lost her footing. The young gypsy with the gun started to laugh.

Rafael was grinning, half-helping, half-fondling Joyce as he levered her up to where Pepe could get hold of her.

The young gypsy was staring down at them. "Now there," he said in Spanish, "is a man who enjoys his work."

Rafael pawed at Joyce and lifted her.

"Damn it, cut the comedy," Pepe said.

The young gypsy began to laugh. Rafael, with a final prodigious effort, heaved Joyce aboard.

There was a moment's confusion as, soaking wet, she got slowly to her feet.

The young gypsy was still laughing when I hit him.

He slammed back against the padded bench in the rear of the cockpit. I was on him before he could get up. I got the Luger and shouted to Joyce. "Get down flat!"

She dropped obediently to the floor of the cockpit and I waved Pepe back to where the young gypsy was. "Hands all the way up," I said, "and keep them there." He obeyed. I moved to the port side of the cockpit.

A shot rang out. It was the peroxide boy in the water. He hadn't hit anybody, but now I heard yells

from the beach. I aimed for his shoulder and let one go with the Luger in my hand. He screamed and flopped into the water, gun and all. Rafael was floundering back through the surf toward the beach. I saw a line of foam and dark shapes approaching us fast: the gypsies from the beach.

"Take her out," I shouted to the peroxide boy at the wheel. He just stood there.

I fired past his head. The windshield shattered, spraying him with glass. I was leaning against the gunwale on the port side of the cockpit, trying to look port and aft at once.

"Take her out now," I said. "Fast."

The engine roared. The boat began to move.

I watched the beach and the gypsies fade behind.

We stood a couple of hundred yards offshore and the big man-made mole that gave Malaga its harbor, ten miles up the coast from Torremolinos. I could see the lights of ocean-going ships in the

harbor, and the city lights of Malaga beyond, strung along the hillside above the bay.

"This is where you get off," I told Pepe.

He looked at me. He licked his lips. "You're crazy," he said. "You can't."

"Why can't I? You can swim, can't you?"

"The gypsies. I told you. They'll slit my throat."

Joyce looked at him steadily. There was something in her eyes that I hadn't seen there before. "I wonder what they'll find when they do," she said quietly.

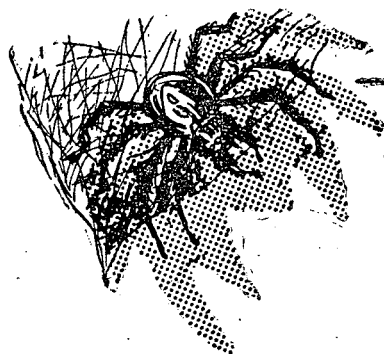
They went over the side one at a time, the gypsy with a sneer, the peroxide boy stiffly, his face frozen with fear, Pepe with a last pleading look at Joyce.

I put the spotlight on them while they were swimming. In a few minutes they clambered up on the mole, then they were gone and I cut the light and made my way forward to the wheel.

The lights of Malaga grew ahead of us, and spread out, and became a city.



*Parlors are, after all, for people.*



# The Parlor

by  
Miel  
Tanburn



**G**UTTMAN regained consciousness in a white chamber and found himself sprawled on a smooth, white floor. He was aware of more whiteness, all about him, as if he were inside a huge block of chalk.

Guttman's hand crept to the back of his head, probing through his long, dark hair, uncut during months of combat. His fingers found a pulpy, throbbing spot, and he winced with pain.

Guttman pushed himself to a sitting position and the activity made him giddy. He steadied himself, still weak, confused, and waited for the dizziness to pass. He didn't

know where he was, but the silence was a relief. For almost as long as he could remember, his ears had been aching from the concussion of explosives and the overhead whistling of artillery shells. Toward the end, the sounds had been different: the shrieks and screams of hand-to-hand combat.

Now aware that he was alone in a white room, he stood up and leaned against a wall while dizziness rocked him. A frightening thought began to take shapeless form in the back of his mind.

Then Guttman realized he was naked. It puzzled him. The room was totally empty. It was about twenty feet square, painted bright white. There were no doors, no windows. There was just screaming silence.

Guttman thought about the final battle. His men, at the front for months, had been trapped in a nightmare. Surrounded by the Aggressor, caught in a pincer, cut off from advance or retreat, they waited for their position to be overrun.

"Remember your mission," Guttman reminded them as the Aggressor moved closer. "Hold them off. Buy time for the rest of the battalion. And above all—"

When they closed with the Aggressor, Guttman's men dropped around him like ripe fruit in a windstorm. Then something had exploded in the back of his head.

What was he doing naked, in this white room? "And above all—"

Then the formless thought, stalking the edge of his memory, sprang at him. "Above all, *don't* let yourself get captured!"

The Aggressor took prisoners only for torture.

Guttman dropped to a crouch, his head suddenly clear and his heart trying to beat free of its cage. He peered narrowly around the room. *Anything* might be waiting. He seemed to be safe in the white silence, *seemed* to be, but was this some kind of psychological preparation? No windows, no doors, a white room, naked . . . What was going on?

Then Guttman saw the spider.

It was jet black and as big as an eight-ball. It hung like a pendulum in a corner of the room, where two walls met the low ceiling. It had long, bent legs and its body was as black and shiny as a piece of coal.

Guttman looked for something with which to kill the huge spider—a shoe, a stick, anything—but the room was empty. Totally empty.

Guttman approached the spider and it moved, disclosing its globular underbelly—and the red hourglass.

Guttman shuddered. *I didn't know they came that big*, he thought.

The giant black widow silently dropped down the wall, then halted, and crawled back up to its corner.

Guttman backed off. *I can't kill it with my hand*, he thought fran-

tically. *There's enough poison there to kill a whole platoon.* Guttman retreated to a far corner to think.

His head was throbbing, and he was thirsty. He couldn't tell how long he'd been unconscious. If he'd been clean-shaven to start with, his whiskers could have given him a clue, but his beard, like his shoulder-length hair, hadn't been cut for months.

*A freak black spider in a white room—and a naked prisoner.*

Guttman examined the room again, wary of the spider. He was able to tell where the door was, although it appeared to be solid and heavy, flush with the walls. It obviously opened from the outside. He leaned against the door, but it was heavy and didn't yield.

Guttman sat on the floor and looked up at the spider. It was moving again. *Well, I can outmaneuver it. After all, it's just a spider.*

Time passed. The spider kept to its own side of the room. Once it crawled halfway across the floor but then retreated again. *It's a standoff, pal,* Guttman thought; *I can't kill you and you can't catch me.*

A rhyme from his childhood went through his head:

*Won't you come into my parlor?  
Said the spider to the fly . . .*

Guttman couldn't remember the rest of it.

His thirst and hunger were becoming uncomfortable. The spider's activity was increasing. It moved restlessly all over the room. Guttman kept backing away.

Suddenly he realized the spider was on the prowl. Of course—it was hungry, too! Guttman didn't know much about the eating habits of spiders, but it seemed to him they were gluttonous—ate ten times their body weight every day, something like that.

Then Guttman understood. *He* was supposed to be food for the spider; *that* was what the Aggressor had in mind. Guttman couldn't kill the spider; all he could do was keep out of its way. But the spider didn't know it couldn't catch Guttman. It would just keep coming after him . . . coming after him . . . and if it ever bit him, Guttman knew, he was dead.

The spider—bulbous, globular, intent—moved on stilted legs with ugly grace; quickly, restlessly. *Won't you come into my parlor?*

*The hell of it,* Guttman thought, *is to know they're working on your nerves, and to let them succeed.* Fatigue, thirst, hunger, his aching head . . . Guttman wouldn't hold up under the strain. *I'll be blubbering like a baby when they carry me out of here.*

Then the final horror of his situation struck him. It had been building like an algebraic equation all day: naked plus spider plus poison plus trapped . . . X equals sleep . . . and sleep equals death!

The finality struck Guttman, and he whimpered. *I won't be blubbering when they carry me out—they'll carry me out feet first.*

*And if it gets dark?* Guttman cried out, a squeaky little cry that made him ashamed of himself. He hadn't even thought about darkness. How was the room lighted, anyway? He couldn't tell, but the gleaming white walls reflected whatever light there was and the room was bright.

*But what if they shut the lights off? And what if I'm falling asleep anyway? A black spider in a white room is bad enough—but a black spider in a black room would be worse. I won't be able to see it, I won't be able to hear it; I won't be able to keep away from it.*

Guttman threw himself at the door in vain. The door was solid.

He sat down and tried to analyze the situation. *One*, he thought, *the spider will kill me if it ever catches me. Two*, *it's bound to catch me eventually. So three*, *I'm as good as dead right now.*

*But I can't just sit here and wait to die.* He examined the alternatives. One, kill the spider; impos-

sible. Two, escape; impossible. Three, keep running; impossible.

Guttman pounded his temples with his fists. *I'm an intelligent man and a trained soldier. There must be a way out of this. Men devised this trap, so a man should be able to figure out a way to escape from it.*

The spider was a hideous, brainless thing, Guttman decided. All it knows is kill, kill, kill. *But man*, he thought, *has an intellect, a soul.*

Guttman knew he had to act soon. Time was on the side of the Aggressor. The longer Guttman waited, the sleepier he would get, and there was always the chance they'd shut off the lights.

Guttman could picture himself stretched out dead, the giant spider feasting on him, when an Aggressor walked through the door to lug his body away.

But what could he do? He was without a weapon; without a chance; helpless, naked.

Guttman pressed his fingers to his temples, trying to soothe his headache, trying to think. As he ran his fingers through his long hair, he conceived a desperate plan. If it worked, it would get him out of the white room alive. What would happen after that, he didn't know. He could solve only one problem at a time.

Guttman began scratching his



thigh. He scratched until he raised a red welt on his leg. He was satisfied that it looked like a spider bite.

Then Guttman gritted his teeth and began pulling hairs out of his head. *They didn't take everything away from me*, he thought grimly. Guttman looped strands of long hair around his finger and yanked the hairs out. He kept his eye on the spider, which was resting, about shoulder high, on a wall.

Guttman pulled more hair out of his head. He pulled until his scalp felt raw. Then he pulled still more. He kept pulling until he had two thick handfuls of long hair. Then he began braiding it. The hair became a thread, a string, a length of twine. Guttman kept braiding. The twine thickened and became a rope of hair, a foot long and twisted tightly. Guttman put a knot in the end of it.

Then he had a weapon. In his hand he held a limp blackjack of hair, heavy and solid at one end. It was a pitiable weapon, but for a soft-bodied spider, even a giant spider, it was lethal.

Guttman slashed at the spider with his blackjack. The spider dropped to the floor. Guttman struck the spider again as it tried to recover. Now it was being chased, not chasing. Guttman struck it again. He killed it with his blackjack. He made sure it was dead.

Then Guttman put his rope of hair on the floor. He picked up the dead spider by one of its legs. The spider was crushed, but not greatly; at first glance, it would appear to be alive.

Guttman sat down on the rope of hair, concealing it, and then stretched out. He placed the spider at the welt on his thigh.

Then Guttman screamed, a shriek of terror that echoed through the white room. *The first Aggressor who comes in here is going to get the surprise of his life when I jump him*, Guttman thought. *But I hope he has a gun. Please let him have a gun. I'll need a gun to get out of here.*

Guttman closed his eyes and pretended to be dead. He waited for an Aggressor to come into his parlor.



*One can never anticipate whether the quiet of night will portend happy dreams—or discomfiting revelations.*



## NIGHT

by Bill Pronzini

THE BOY was brought into Juvenile Hall shortly past midnight. When Ben Stefani heard the swing doors at the far end of the high-ceilinged room open, he swiveled his gaunt frame from the corner of Phil Cavellon's desk, yawned, and got to his feet. He finished what was left of his sixth cup of coffee, crumpled the container, and threw it in the wastebasket.

Cavellon pulled the report he had been typing from the outdated machine at his side and dropped it into the wire tray on his desk. He rubbed a hand tiredly through his blond hair, said, "I knew it was too good to last."

"What's that?" Stefani asked him.

"The quiet. First quiet night we've had in a month. I knew it was too good to last."

"The trouble with you," Stefani said, "you're a frustrated writer. Never saw anybody who enjoyed paper work like you do. Peace and quiet and a typewriter, and you're right at home."

"Oh, sure," Cavellon said drily. "I have this wild desire to write dirty books in my spare time. Just so I can keep sharp for reports, you understand."

"Everybody needs a hobby," Stefani said, and stifled another yawn. Watching the two blue-uniformed patrolmen bringing the boy across to where he stood behind the front desk, the leathery surface of his forehead knitted into a frown.

The boy was young; sixteen, maybe seventeen, Stefani judged. His skin was white and clear, giving the effect of semi-translucency, and dark hair lay flat on his skull, combed straight back. Thin, almost fragile-appearing, he was dressed in baggy brown corduroys, a light windbreaker and tennis shoes. He looked very small between the two patrolmen.

When the three of them neared the desk, they stopped. "Sit down there," one of the patrolmen said to the boy, indicating the long, slat-backed bench against the side wall. The boy sat stiffly, his eyes cast downward to the floor.

The patrolmen came up to the desk, and the one who had spoken placed a sheet of paper in front of Stefani. "Patrolman Winchek, sir," he said. "This is my partner, John Gordon."

Stefani nodded. "What can we do for you?"

"Got a funny one here," Winchek said. "Thought it best to bring him to you."

Stefani glanced over at the boy. "Oh?" he said. "What did he do?"

"Well, originally we stopped him for curfew. It was well past eleven, you see."

"Go on," Stefani said.

"We were cruising in the Sunset District and we spotted him along La Royo. He looked pretty young,

so we pulled over to tell him he'd better get along home."

"And?"

"He ran. Soon as he spotted us he took off like a rabbit. We flagged him down."

Stefani sensed there was more. He waited.

Winchek said, "He had this on him." From the pocket of his leather jacket he produced a .32 calibre revolver and laid it on the desk before Stefani. "Under his coat."

Stefani picked up the gun and turned it over in his hand. White light from the fluorescent domes overhead glinted off the blued steel. The gun looked new. The barrel was free of scratches. The check-pattern stock was smooth and unworn. He asked, "Loaded?"

"Every chamber."

"Any trouble?"

"None. He gave it right up."

"He tell you where he got it?"

"We tried to question him. He wouldn't tell us anything."

"You get his name and address?"

"Just that. It's on the report."

"All right," Stefani said. "Thanks. We'll take it from here. Might want you later, though. We'll let you know."

"Yes, sir," Winchek said, and the two patrolmen turned and walked back to the doors, their

footsteps making deep, hollow sounds in the emptiness of the hall. When they had gone, it was quiet again.

Stefani stared after them for a moment, then his eyes shifted to the boy, sitting motionless on the bench. Stefani picked up the report Winchek had given him, read it, then handed it to Cavellon who had come up to stand beside him.

"See if you can get his folks on the phone," Stefani said. "Have them get down here."

"Right." Cavellon copied the name and address on a pad and returned the report to Stefani.

"And take care of this," Stefani said, handing him the gun.

"Want me to run a check?"

"Better let me talk to the boy first. Maybe later, though."

Cavellon nodded. Stefani came around the front desk and went to where the boy sat. The boy did not look up. Stefani said, "Come with me, son. We can talk in my office."

The boy said nothing, but rose from the bench and followed Stefani to the small office directly across from where Cavellon sat behind the front desk. The office made up one corner where the hall right-angled into a passageway leading to other offices, vacant now, and the rest rooms. It was windowed on two sides, so that it

was possible to see whatever went on in the hall.

Stefani held the door to the office open, the boy stepped inside, and Stefani shut the door. He said, "Have a seat, son."

The boy sat on a straight wooden chair in front of the desk, stiffly, as he had on the bench outside. He held his hands folded in his lap.

Stefani anchored himself on a corner of his desk. "My name is Ben Stefani," he said. "I'm the night juvenile officer here." He held out his hand.

The boy hesitated, and then took the hand. His own was limp and moist.

Stefani said, "And you're Jerry Cone."

"Yes."

"Let's see, you live at 19 Harper Court?"

"Yes."

"That's out near the beach, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"You live with your parents, Jerry?"

"My aunt," the boy said. His voice was very flat. "My parents are dead."

"I'm sorry."

"It was a long time ago."

Stefani studied the boy who sat before him. He was a perceptive man, an adept psychologist after

twenty-five years of juvenile work, and his appraisals of the countless young people he had encountered during those years were almost un-failingly accurate.

He saw two distinct characteristics in Jerry Cone. First, he saw, from the boy's manner and from the way he kept his eyes cast perpetually downward, a certain sense of inferiority. He could not know, of course, without probing the boy's mind, the reason for this complex—perhaps it was some inadequacy experienced in his childhood, or an oversensitiveness to his frail physical appearance, or any of a dozen other reasons.

Secondly, Stefani saw in Jerry Cone a deep-rooted introversion, possibly as a result of that feeling of inferiority. Stefani had met with this introversion before, and it was readily recognizable, even with the short exchange of conversation between them. A shell, Stefani decided. He's built a shell around himself, and retreated inside, to hide there within its protective walls.

Stefani picked up the report and read it again. It was going to be difficult to communicate with this boy, to penetrate that protective shell. He said quietly, "Tell me, Jerry. Have you ever been arrested before?"

"No," the boy said.

"Ever been in trouble, Jerry?"

"No."

"You're in trouble now, you know."

The boy said nothing.

Stefani said, "The charge here is a serious one, Jerry. The law holds stiff penalties for a minor carrying a loaded and concealed weapon."

Jerry Cone nodded faintly.

Stefani picked up a ball-point pen and studied the clip. "Where did you get the gun, Jerry?"

The boy hesitated for a fraction, then said, "I found it."

"Where?"

"In a lot."

"What lot?"

"Just a lot. A vacant lot."

"Where is this lot?"

"I don't know. It was just a lot. I was walking through this lot and I saw the gun lying in the tall grass. I just picked it up. That's all."

"It was just lying in the grass?"

"Yes."

"Was it loaded?"

"I don't know."

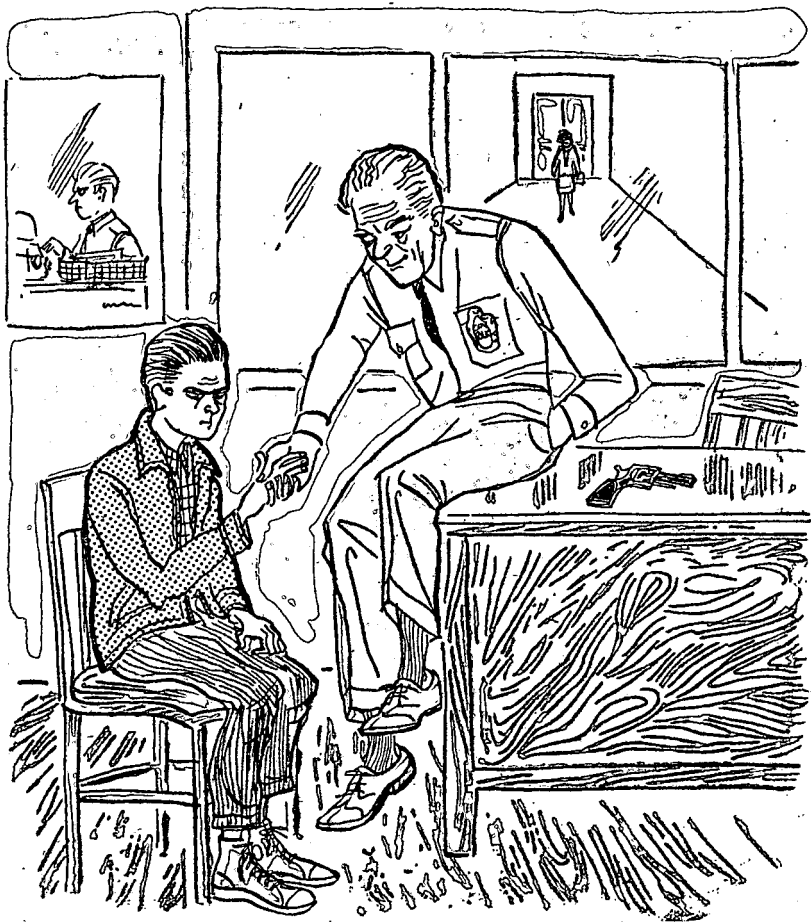
"Didn't you check it?"

"I don't know much about guns."

"It *was* loaded, Jerry."

The boy said nothing.

Stefani took out his cigarettes and extended the pack to where the boy was sitting. "Cigarette,



Jerry?" He waited for his answer.

The boy studied his hands. He shook his head. "No. I don't smoke."

"Nasty habit, anyway," Stefani said, lighting one for himself. He exhaled smoke. "So you found the gun in this vacant lot."

"That's right. In a vacant lot."

"Then why did you run?"

"What?"

"The officers said you ran when they stopped. Why, Jerry?"

"I guess I was afraid."

"Because you had the gun?"

"Yes."

"If you found the gun, then you had nothing to fear. All you had to do was turn it over to the officers."

The boy wet his lips. "I wanted to keep it."

"Why?"

"I just wanted to keep it, that's all."

"All right. What would you have done with it, then?"

"I told you, keep it."

"Yes, but then what? Hang it on your wall?"

"I don't know. Something."

"What would your aunt have said when she saw it?"

"My aunt wouldn't have said anything."

"Are you telling me that if you'd come into your home with a loaded gun, your aunt would have nothing to say? Like you had brought home a stray dog?"

"She wouldn't have seen it."

"You wouldn't have shown it to her, you mean?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I just wouldn't have."

Stefani frowned. He let silence build for a few seconds. Then he said, "Why were you out after curfew, Jerry?"

"I was walking."

"Where?"

"Nowhere. Just walking."

"Do you walk often?"

"Sometimes I do. Not always."

"How long were you walking tonight?"

"I don't know. A couple of hours, I guess."

"Any special reason?"

"Reason?"

"For walking. For walking after curfew."

"No."

"None?"

"I wanted to be alone. I wanted to think."

"About what?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to think."

"So you were walking?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"All over."

"Any place in particular?"

"No. Uptown for a while. Just walking."

"And while you were walking you found the gun."

"Yes."

Stefani picked up the officer's report again. Just then, Cavellon rapped on the door and came inside. "See you for a minute, Ben?"

"Sure," Stefani said. He rose and looked at the boy, whose eyes, as they had been throughout the entire conversation, were riveted on his hands. The backs seemed to hold a fascinating interest. Stefani stepped outside and closed the door.



Cavellon said, "What did you find out, Ben?"

Stefani shrugged. "Says he found the gun. In a vacant lot."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Stolen, maybe?"

"It's possible."

"He doesn't look the type."

"Is there any type?"

"You know what I mean, Ben. You get so you can tell. He just doesn't seem to be the kind of kid that gets in trouble."

Stefani said nothing, a frown touching the corner of his eyes.

After a moment Cavellon said, "Want me to run that check now?"

"You'd better."

"Okay. Oh, what I wanted to see you about, I got the boy's aunt on the phone. Maiden aunt. He lives with her. Folks are dead."

"I know," Stefani said. "You tell the aunt about it?"

"Just that we were holding the boy."

"Not about the gun?"

"No."

Stefani nodded. "It's just as well."

Cavellon went to his desk and got the night man in Robbery on the phone. He gave the description and serial number of the gun. Stefani stood by his desk, smoking. After several minutes, Cavellon replaced the receiver. "Robbery

has nothing on the gun," he said, "but if it was stolen tonight, the report on it wouldn't be in till morning."

Stefani inclined his head. He was pondering the story the boy had told him. He knew that there was no logical reason why he should not simply accept the fact that Jerry Cone had found the gun in a vacant lot, just as he had said, but there was a feeling he had gotten, almost immediately upon questioning the boy, a nagging, intuitive feeling that he could not identify. Something was wrong, the feeling seemed to say. Something was very wrong.

He was still trying to attach a meaning, a significance, to that feeling when the sound of the swing doors opening at the far end of the hall interrupted his thoughts ten minutes later.

A woman came inside, stood uncertainly, her tiny hands nervously fingering a straw handbag. Her eyes darted about, bird-like, and then she began to walk toward the front desk.

She was small and very thin, an older, female counterpart of the boy who sat in Stefani's office. Her hair was sparse, the neutral color of dust, and she wore a shapeless saffron-colored wash dress and a gray sweater hung loosely over her shoulders. Her skin, marred only

by narrow lines beneath her eyes and in the deep hollow of her throat, held the same effect of translucency as her nephew's.

When she reached the desk, Stefani saw that her pale gray eyes appeared frightened. She said in a faltering soprano voice, "My name is Margaret Cone. Jerry's aunt?" She made it a question.

Stefani introduced himself and Cavellon. Then he undid the catch on the swing gate to one side of the desk and held it open. Margaret Cone came inside. "Won't you have a seat, Miss Cone?" Stefani said, indicating the chair beside Cavellon's desk.

She sat erect, knees and ankles tightly together, hands clutching the handbag in her lap. She focused her attention on Stefani. "Is Jerry all right?" she asked him.

"He's fine," Stefani said. "He's sitting in my office now."

"What . . . what has he done?" She seemed to be steeling herself for the answer.

"We're not sure he's done anything," Stefani said.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Jerry was stopped by two officers on La Royo shortly before midnight. He was walking alone, after curfew."

"Oh, oh, I see," Margaret Cone said. "I thought . . ."

"You thought what, Miss Cone?"

"Nothing. It's really nothing."

Stefani frowned. "Miss Cone, Jerry had a gun in his possession."

He heard the sharp intake of her breath. She paled. "A . . . gun?"

"A .32 calibre revolver," Stefani said. "Do you have any idea where he might have gotten it?"

"No, no, none at all."

"He ran when the officers approached him," Stefani said. "He said he found the gun in a vacant lot and wanted to keep it."

"Keep it? But why would he want to keep a gun? It was a *real* gun, did you say?"

"Very real," Stefani said. "It was loaded."

Margaret Cone's lower lip trembled. She bit it between sharp, white little teeth.

Stefani said, "Miss Cone, is something the matter?"

"No. No, it's nothing."

"We're trying to help, Miss Cone," Stefani said gently. "For a boy as young as Jerry to be found with a loaded gun is a serious offense in this state. If he found it, as he said, then he won't be in any trouble. Anything you can tell us . . ."

"Jerry's a good boy," Margaret Cone said. "If he said he found it, then he must have."

"He's never been in trouble before?"

"No. He's quiet, really very

moody at times. He likes to be alone. But he's a good boy."

"Does he take these late evening walks often?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he was going tonight?"

"No. He . . . doesn't confide in me."

"How do you mean?"

"We're not very close, I'm afraid. He's a lonely boy, Mr. Stefani. He shuts out our world most of the time. He lives in his own private world, do you understand?"

"Yes," Stefani said. He understood very well.

"I've tried to talk to him, establish a relationship with him, but I can't seem to enter his world. Sometimes he . . ." She broke off, twisting the straps of her handbag together.

"Yes, Miss Cone?"

Her tongue darted between her thin lips and then retreated. "He's a good boy, Mr. Stefani," she said again. "I want you to understand that. He doesn't get into trouble and he doesn't talk back or disobey. It's just that . . . well, I . . ."

Stefani waited, not speaking.

Margaret Cone took a long breath. "It's just that he . . . frightens me at times."

"Frightens you?"

"His eyes," Margaret Cone said. "Sometimes I look into his eyes

and I . . . I see strange things there. Oh, I can't explain it. It's difficult to explain."

The uneasy feeling Stefani had felt before returned, intensified, but he still could not place it. He said softly, "What things?"

"Strange things," Margaret Cone said. "Just . . ." She met Stefani's steady gaze. "Please, Mr. Stefani. Are you going to keep Jerry here? Are you going to charge him with anything?"

Stefani was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Not at this time, Miss Cone. As far as we're concerned, Jerry found the gun in a vacant lot, just as he said. However, if we discover differently upon later investigation, there may be charges filed."

"I understand," Margaret Cone said. "Then we're free to go home now?"

Stefani nodded. "If you will sign a routine form with Sergeant Cavellon, I'll release him in your custody."

"Yes, of course."

Cavellon extended the release form he had typed, along with a pen, across the desk.

Stefani went across to his office then, opened the door, and said, "Jerry."

The boy did not look up.

"Your aunt's here," Stefani said.

"I know," the boy said. "I saw

her come in." He waited quietly.

"You're free to go now."

"Then you believe I found the gun?"

"For the present, yes," Stefani said. "I hope for your sake that you're telling the truth."

The boy said nothing. He stood and walked past Stefani, head down. The two of them went to the front desk. Jerry stopped beside Margaret Cone.

"Hello, aunt," he said.

"Hello, Jerry," she said. She put an arm, tentatively, about his shoulders. "I was just telling the officers that I'm sure you didn't steal that gun. I know you wouldn't do anything like that."

The boy merely nodded. Margaret Cone looked at Stefani. "May we go now, please?"

Stefani nodded. "I may want to talk to you both tomorrow."

"Yes, all right," she said. With her arm about her nephew's shoulders she turned and they began to walk away.

They had gone only a few feet when the boy stopped, then turned, slowly, raised his head and faced Stefani squarely for the first time. Their eyes met for the first time, met and locked, locked and held, and a river of ice flowed down Stefani's spine, a wave of intense, numbing cold that caught his breath in his throat, and he

thought, *Oh, my God!* because in that single instant, that single meeting of their eyes, he had looked inside Jerry Cone's protective shell, seen into his private world and what lay hidden there.

Abruptly, the boy turned and went to the swing doors; his aunt following, and they disappeared into the quiet city night.

Stefani stood staring after them for a long while, and then he went behind the front desk, moving mechanically, and sank into the chair next to Cavellon's desk. His hand rested on the corner of the desk, and the hand was trembling.

"Ben, what's the matter?" Cavellon asked, alarmed. "You look ill."

Stefani closed his eyes, and then opened them again, looking at Cavellon. "Phil," he said softly. "I'm not an alarmist. You know that. I don't draw hasty conclusions. But I've had a feeling ever since I began talking to that boy, a feeling I couldn't identify until just now."

"Feeling?" Cavellon said. "What feeling?"

"His aunt was right," Stefani said, almost to himself. "It's in his eyes. When he looked at me just now, I saw it all there in his eyes."

"Saw what?" Cavellon said. He leaned forward. "What are you getting at?"

Stefani passed a hand across his

face. "That boy is going to kill someone," he said slowly. "Just as sure as you and I are sitting here, Jerry Cone is going to commit murder."

"*Murder?*" Cavellon said in disbelief. "Ben, do you know what you're saying?"

"I know," Stefani said. "Yes, I know."

"But who?" Cavellon asked. "Ben, who . . . ?"

"I don't know," Stefani said. "It could be anybody—his aunt, a girlfriend, a schoolmate—anybody. It was all there in his eyes, Phil; the hate, the purpose. Someone has offended him deeply, hurt him deeply. He's going to kill that someone. That's why he had the gun. That's why he ran when he saw the patrolmen. Whether he stole it or not is unimportant. But he had it, loaded, and he was going to use it."

"If you're right—"

"I'm right," Stefani said. "God help me, I'm right."

"But then he's still going to go through with it. If not with the gun, then . . ."

Stefani nodded in mute anguish.

"Ben, we've got to stop him!"

"How?"

"Go after him, tell him that we know . . ."

"He'd only deny it," Stefani said. "He's made up his mind. The fact that we know isn't going to change it."

"We could arrest him," Cavellon said. "Lock him up for psychiatric observation—"

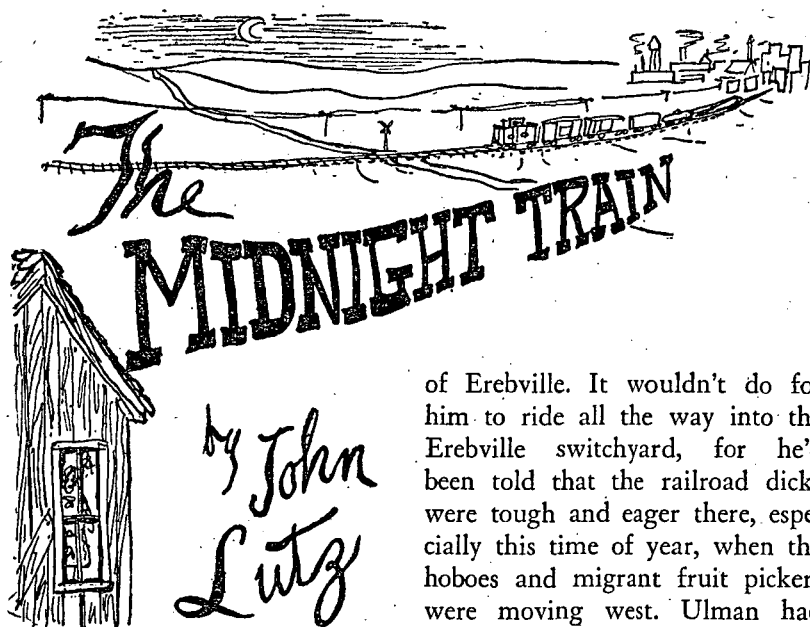
"You need definite grounds for that, Phil, and we don't have any proof, even any idea *who*. Even if we did, he hasn't done anything yet. How long do you think we could hold him without any evidence?"

Cavellon wet his suddenly dry lips. "There must be *something*," he said. "We can't just sit and wait for it to happen. It's too damned horrible!"

"But that's the only thing we *can* do," Stefani said, and his voice was that of an old man, a tired and helpless old man. "Wait. And maybe pray. Because there's not one thing on God's earth we can do to stop it."



*Mr. A. Pope, too, advocated, "Welcome the coming, speed the going guest."*



of Erebbville. It wouldn't do for him to ride all the way into the Erebbville switchyard, for he'd been told that the railroad dicks were tough and eager there, especially this time of year, when the hoboes and migrant fruit pickers were moving west. Ulman had been told back east by a knowledgeable one-eyed hobo that the train would slow for this crossing about midnight, and that was the time to leap.

He made his way across the lurching car to the wide steel door that was closed all the way to a warped two-by-four, which he'd jammed in place to keep from getting locked in. He held on to the edge of the door for a moment,

**F**ROM far in front of Ulman the shrill, drawn out sound of the locomotive's whistle drifted back, long and lonely notes, like the forlorn wails of a distant siren. Ulman, bracing himself against a rough plywood wall, in the swaying boxcar, rose slowly. He could feel the train losing speed already as it slowed for the unmarked and seldom used crossing just outside

drew a deep breath, then with all his strength shot it sliding open.

Cool country air rushed in on him as he looked out into moonless darkness. He rubbed his grizzled chin, waiting for just the right moment. As the train rolled to its slowest point, then began to regain its speed, he leaped.

Ulman got to his feet slowly, slapping the dust off his clothes. His legs felt rubbery after the constant motion and his ears missed the constant roar. He grinned as that roar diminished and he saw the train's lights disappear in the distance. Tomorrow he'd hike to the other side of Erebylle and jump the next twelve o'clock train west.

But where to spend the night? That was the problem, but a problem that Ulman had solved hundreds of times before. He stared about him into the darkness, and then he saw the lights. They appeared to be coming from the window of a house about a mile off. It struck Ulman as odd that one of these country families would be up so late, and lucky, for he might be able to negotiate for a bunk in an outbuilding. If not that, at least he'd have a chance for a good feed in the morning. He made sure that nothing had fallen from his pockets, then set off walking.

It turned out to be a small frame

farmhouse, and the only outbuildings were a ramshackle barn and a pigpen, neither of which appealed to Ulman as night quarters. He walked quietly toward the porch, noting that the usually present farm dog hadn't barked to reveal his presence. Before stepping up on the porch he decided to peek in one of the shadeless windows.

The inside of the house was dirty and cheaply furnished. The naked bulb in the ceiling fixture cast bright light over a worn carpet, ancient, ready-to-collapse chairs and a ripped sofa. Ulman decided to sleep in the open tonight and approach the house again in the morning for breakfast. He was about to turn away when a woman entered the room.

Her inexpensive flower-print dress matched her surroundings, but the woman didn't. She was about thirty, Ulman guessed, tall and graceful, with fine features, straight brown hair and very large blue eyes. Though the dress she wore was obviously cheap, it couldn't have been designed or worn better to show off her curvaceous figure. The hemline was well above shapely knees, the waist drawn in, the neckline low. She held a white cat cradled in her left arm while she idly stroked it with a graceful right hand. Ulman



could tell somehow by her actions that she was alone.

Her beauty caused Ulman to draw in his breath sharply. The remoteness of the situation sent very evil thoughts darting across his mind; thoughts which he quickly dispelled, for Ulman was a poetic if not a literate man, a man who appreciated beauty and was at the same bound by the peculiar morality of his type.

As he watched, the woman set the cat down and smoothed her dress sensually, seductively, with her slender hands. Ulman backed away from the window, frightened by the lust that was pounding through his veins, knowing to what it could ultimately lead. He turned and made himself walk quietly away. Then he made himself run.

Just after sunrise the next morning, Ulman rose from his cramped position beneath a tree, stretched, brushed off his canvas wind-breaker, and began walking toward the farmhouse.

The house appeared more squalid in the daylight than it had the night before. Ulman noted that the fields surrounding it were grown over with weeds. He saw no stock except for a hog near the barn and several chickens in the barren farmyard. Then he noted two more hogs on the other

side of the barn, but his eyes were trained on them for only a second. They switched immediately to the woman, still wearing the print dress, hanging a breeze-whipped line of wash.

She was aware of him, Ulman could tell, but she pretended not to notice him as she stretched upward to fasten clothespins as he



approached. He stood silently for a moment, taking her in with his eyes, aware of the sharp, scrunching sound of wood and rope on wet cloth as she jammed down the final clothespin to hold a sheet to the line, then turned. There was no surprise or fear in her blue eyes, and this made Ulman even more ill at ease in the face of her beauty.

"Your mister at home?" he asked. He knew the answer to that.

"Ain't no mister here," she said, shifting her weight to one foot and staring frankly at him.

"I, uh, wonder," Ulman said, "if you could spare a bite of breakfast. I'd be willin' to work for it."

She ignored the question. "You hopped off'n that freight went by here last night, didn't you?"

Ulman's heart leaped. Had she seen him at the window? He decided to play it casually. "Sure did, missy. On my way to a job in California."

"California's a long ways."

"Sure is." Ulman rubbed his chin. "How'd you know I come off that freight?"

"Lots of fellas do," she said. "For some reason they don't want to ride all the way in to Erebbville."

"Railroad dicks," Ulman said bitterly. "Always ready to lay a club alongside a man's head."

The woman smiled suddenly. "My name's Cyrila."

Ulman returned the grin, ashamed of his soiled clothes and dirty face. "Lou Ulman."

"Well, Mr. Ulman, you can wash up there at the pump an' I'll fix us some eggs."

Ulman grinned again, his eyes involuntarily running up and down the woman. "I appreciate it, ma'am."

Surprisingly the breakfast of scrambled eggs, bread, fresh-

brewed coffee, and a tall glass of orange juice looked delicious. Ulman sat down across from the woman at the table and began to eat with enthusiasm as he discovered the food to be as tasty as it looked. After the first few bites he realized she was staring at him.

"You say you live here alone?" he asked, wiping a corner of his mouth with a forefinger.

Cyrila nodded, her blue eyes still fixed on him intently. "Husband died five years ago."

Ulman took a large bite of bread and talked around it. "Quite a job makin' ends meet for a woman, ain't it? What do you raise?"

"Pigs, mostly. A few chickens."

Ulman nodded. "Them's nice lookin' pigs. How many you got?"

The woman sipped her coffee. "'Bout a dozen. Hard to keep more'n that in feed. I sell 'em in the fall when they're fat enough and use some of the money to buy piglets."

"Start all over again then, huh?"

The woman nodded, smiling her beautiful smile. "Toilin' in the fields ain't woman's work," she said with a hint of coyness. "Pigs is about all that's left in these parts. Good profit in 'em if you can afford to feed 'em all summer long."

Ulman finished his eggs and licked the fork appreciatively.

"More, Mr. Ulman?" Her eyelids fluttered exaggeratedly and he suspected she was trying to use her feminine wiles on him, trying to lead him on.

He thought, looking at her, *I ain't that lucky*. "No, no thank you, ma'am. I'm full up."

"If you will, call me Cyrila," she said, toying with her coffee spoon.

Ulman hesitated, then smiled. "Sure will," he said, "Cyrila."

"There's a stack of firewood out behind the barn," she said smiling. "It does need—"

"Now, Cyrila," Ulman interrupted, "I said I'd work for my food an' I meant it. Just show me where the ax is."

After he'd chopped wood for an hour, Ulman found himself scything down the tall weeds behind the house, then mending the crude wire fence that surrounded the pigpen on the other side of the barn. Most of the time he worked he sang to himself, all the time watching for Cyrila as she worked in the house and yard. Now and then she'd smile and wave to him from a window, or turn from getting water at the pump and give him a warm look.

It must get lonely out here without a man, Ulman muttered, wielding the heavy hammer. It must.

It was almost sundown when he

finished. He washed up at the pump while she stood gracefully on the porch, watching. He let the still-hot sun dry him briefly, slipped on his shirt, slicked back his hair with wet fingers and walked toward her, following her into the house.

It was cooler inside the house, and dim. The reverberating slam of the rusty screen door rang through the heavy air and left them in silence.

"You surely did a good day's work," she said. Her smile seemed a little forced this time, and she held onto the back of the old sofa as if for support.

He grinned and shrugged. "I guess you need a man around here, is all."

"Don' I know it, now?" She stepped away from the sofa. "I bet you sure worked up a thirst."

"Thirst? Well, yeah. It's close to that ol' bewitchin' hour, though, an' I gotta be on the other side of Erebbville to jump that train. But if you got somethin' around . . ."

"I think there's some still in the cupboard," she said, the smile still set on her face. "It'll be old. Jus' use it for guests and medicine."

Ulman followed her into the kitchen. "The older the better."

His eyes roved up her as she stood on her toes to reach the top shelf. There were some cans and

three bottles up there, two off-brand whiskeys and a more expensive bourbon bottle half full. She got down the expensive bottle and turned, handing it to him.

Ulman took a long swig, savoring the smoothness and warmth of the bourbon. The woman was watching him. He moved to hand the bottle back to her and her hand closed on his, squeezing the fingers about the neck of the bottle as if she meant for him to keep it. He was surprised to see that she was on the verge of crying.

"You're right, Mr. Ulman," she said, looking up at him. "I surely do need a man around here." She buried her head on his shoulder, sobbing, her body pressed against him. With his right hand Ulman held the bottle, with his left Cyrila's warm back. With his foot he kicked open the bedroom door.

It was pitch dark in the farmhouse when Cyrila rose. She stood by the bed, stretching languidly, then walked barefoot into the kitchen. She placed the bourbon bottle back in the cupboard, aside

from the other bottles, and slipped into some old coveralls, rolled up at the sleeves.

Then the only sounds in the darkness were a heavy thump in the bedroom and the squeak of the rusty wheelbarrow axle. Some time later, from the area of the barn, came the uneven gnashing of the chicken feed grinder working on something hard, amid the loud, thoroughly satisfied grunting and rooting of the pigs.

An hour later Cyrila was standing on the farmhouse porch. She had on her flower-print dress again, and behind her every light in the house blazed. A far-off wail, like a forlorn siren, rolled through the night. She stood listening to the approaching thunder of the distant train, heard it slow momentarily, then with a blast of new thunder begin to regain its speed. Gradually it left her in silence. She unconsciously smoothed the dress over her hips, sighed, then turned and walked into the house. The midnight train roared westward through the inky darkness—but Ulman wasn't on it.



*"Of ten troubles you can see coming down the road, nine may never arrive."*

# THE TENTH TROUBLE

**S**HE did not merely walk into the lobby of the hotel nor did she stride. She did not saunter, but seemed to creep as some small animals creep—warily, watchfully. She wore her sixty years with a certain care but without undue concern. Her skin was almost translucent like that of fine old porcelain, well cared for but always threatening to crack. Her gray hair was fluffy and unstylish, and wisps of it kept escaping from under her flat black hat.



By  
Leo P. Kelley

She hesitated in the middle of the lobby, fingering the clasp on her handbag nervously. She looked over her shoulder and sighed with relief as she saw her bags being carried in by the bellboy. She let the youngster, all crew cut and muscles, lead her to the desk where, behind a grill, lounged the bored room clerk, reading the race results. He looked up, said, "Room?"

She nodded, tested a smile. "If you please. Something quiet."

The clerk slid a registration card toward her and plopped a pen down on it while she pulled off, finger by finger, her black cotton gloves. She signed the card: Mrs. Celine Beauvais, Toulons, France.

"How long you staying?" inquired the room clerk.

"How long? Well, I really can't say. I'm quite uncertain actually. You see, I've just come back to America. A month, I expect, at least."

She seemed to be asking permission of the room clerk, but for what it was difficult to say. He raised his hand and waved it. The bellboy who had carried her bags leaped to the desk, grinning as if at some secret joke. The clerk handed him a key.

Mrs. Beauvais hesitated and then, in a voice laced with gentility, asked, "What will be the rent, if you please?"

"Four-fifty a day. Pay when you check out."

"No, no. I'd rather—that is, if you don't mind—couldn't I pay in advance? I like to keep my accounts in apple-pie order."

"If you insist," the room clerk said. "Just step down to the cashier's counter. Tell them you're in 312."

"Excuse me," Mrs. Beauvais said, stepping around the waiting bellboy, clutching her handbag like a life preserver.

"Here, ma'am, I'll show you," the bellboy volunteered. He led her to the cashier's counter and told the girl behind it, "This here is Mrs. Beauvais. She'll be staying with us in 312. She wants to pay in advance. Mrs. Beauvais, the young lady here will see to things."

"Oh, thank you, son," she said.

She paid a month in advance, carefully counting out the money from the thick roll of bills bound with two rubber bands which she had extracted from the bottom of her handbag. The bellboy studiously looked the other way as she rewound the rubber bands around the remaining bills and tucked them deep down in her bag. Taking her receipt and turning to the boy, she smiled and said, "Well, that's settled, isn't it. Now—"

"This way, ma'am. The elevator's right over here."

She followed him across the lobby, past the old ladies sitting like faded doilies on the thick furniture, past the men with their papers and their pipes, and into the elevator and up to the third floor.

Once inside the room, the bell-boy placed her bags on the floor, opened a window, switched on the bathroom light, propped the room service menu against the mirror and headed for the door.

"Young man," Mrs. Beauvais said, "one moment." She fumbled in her handbag, withdrew a coin and handed it to the boy.

"Thank you," he said. "If there's anything you need, just ask for me. I'm Jerry. I'm new here. Glad to run any little errands or like that. Pop over to the drugstore or up to the deli. You just ask for Jerry, hear?"

"I will, indeed. Thank you, young Jerry."

He gave her a snappy salute and vanished behind the gently closing door.

Mrs. Beauvais went to the window and looked out on a dark and dismal courtyard flanked by the other wings of the hotel. She shrugged. In New York, she reminded herself, one seldom sees anything beyond one's window except one's neighbors staring back. At least the sound of the New York traffic did not reach her here.

How she hated the angry automobile horns and the groaning hum of the city! It was like being trapped in a zoo.

As she unpacked, she hummed a tune. Glancing at her tiny wrist-watch, she saw that it was almost two o'clock. She carried her toilet articles into the bathroom and placed them neatly on the shelves of the medicine cabinet, making a moue of distaste as she noticed that the mirror was cracked in the corner. She picked up her battery-operated toothbrush, carried it back into the bedroom, then sat down on the bed and unscrewed the bottom of the toothbrush. Picking up her handbag, she extracted the roll of money from it. After unpeeling three one dollar bills, she stuffed the roll into the empty tube of the toothbrush where the batteries once had been, then replaced the cap and carried the toothbrush "safe deposit box" back into the bathroom and set it beside her lilac dusting powder on one of the shelves of the medicine cabinet.

She ran the water, lukewarm, in the tub and bathed, damning the miniscule bars of soap supplied by the hotel, which provided so little lather. She would buy her own soap, she decided. Jerry could pick it up for her. A nice young man, Jerry. She stepped gingerly out of the tub and patted herself dry, lis-

tening to the water gurgle down the drain to a wet oblivion.

She touched her hair once and twice in front of the mirror, cocked her head and gave the old girl in the mirror a hopeful grin. She vigorously brushed her shoulders, then picked up her handbag and went out of the room and down the hall, smiling graciously at the dawdling maids as she waited for the elevator.

In the lobby, she made for the red doors studded with brass nails above which neon announced: Cocktail Lounge. She sat down at a little table no bigger than a peppermint and when the waiter came she ordered Pernod. He brought it, and she stared at it like an old friend, then sipped. Ah, anise!

"Why, if it isn't—"

"What?" she cried, startled.

"I beg your pardon," said the man looming over her in the half light of the lounge. "Just like me, old bungler that I am. I thought you were someone I knew. You looked for a minute just like—Well, let it go. I've really got to get these glasses changed. First thing!"

"It's quite all right," she told him, turning away.

"Name's Ian McGrath," said the man, sitting down beside her. "I'm not in the habit of barging in on people but you do look like Lillian, bless her. Mind if I join you?"



Well, what could she do? Tell him to go? Summon the waiter? Get up and leave—leave her hardly tasted Pernod? She sat quite still, her eyes on the glass in front of her.

"I see I'm disturbing you, Miss. Sorry, awfully so." He started to rise.

"No," he said, "it's all right. And it's *Mrs. Mrs. Beauvais*."

"How do you do, Mrs. Beauvais," he said, beckoning to the waiter. "Sauterne," he ordered.

"Who was Lillian?" Mrs. Beauvais asked.

"Oh, now, there's a tale to tell! Lillian, yes; explorer type, disappeared while tracing a tributary of the Amazon. '59 it was, I think. Poor little thing. Awful thing, awful."



"I'm so sorry. Was she your— Oh, forgive me, I shouldn't pry."

"No, we weren't married. Not even engaged. Good friends, that's all. Are you staying with us?"

"With you? Oh, you mean here at the hotel. Yes. Yes, I am. Temporarily. Until I can get myself pulled together."

"Trouble?" he asked, leaning toward her over his sauterne that the waiter had deposited in front of him. "Look, Mrs. Beauvais, we've all got trouble. Does one good to talk about it. Especially to a stranger you might never see again." Conspiratorially, "Pretend we're in London. It's 1943. Bombs blasting all over. We've taken cover in a shelter, you see, while we wait for the All Clear to sound. We're total strangers—ships passing in the night—that sort of thing. Talk to me."

*Villain, she thought. Charming, charming villain. I do seem to attract the type.*

"Mrs. Beauvais?"

"Mr. McGrath, it's a dull story and a terribly trite one. You've probably heard it a thousand times. My husband, he was Sûreté, died suddenly three months ago in Paris. We were at the Cote d'Azur on holiday when it happened. He was worried about his pension. He'd been sick off and on, and he was afraid that they were going to sug-

gest an early retirement with a lower pension. Then, too, we were concerned about other things, little things. You know."

"When troubles come, they come not single spies but in battalions," quoted McGrath sonorously.

"Well, he died. Right there on the beach under the sun with the sound of the boys and girls calling out to each other and bright beach-balls bouncing all around. Heart."

McGrath reached out and patted her hand tenderly. "My deepest sympathy, dear lady."

She managed a little laugh and pulled a handkerchief from the sleeve of her dress. After touching each eye delicately, she then returned the handkerchief to its hiding place. "Calvin Coolidge," she began, "said it for all of us: 'Of ten troubles you can see coming down the road, nine may never arrive.'"

"True, true."

"I wonder, do you understand, Mr. McGrath?"

"Certainly. Most of the things we worry about never come to pass."

"Yes, that's part of it. But consider, please: Monsieur Beauvais was worried about losing part of his pension, one of the ten troubles he could see coming down the road, but it was that unexpected tenth one, the one that *came*, that did the dirty trick—his heart at-

tack. We should all beware of that."

"Just so," McGrath agreed solemnly, shaking his head that was grizzly with tightly curled red hair. "It's what you don't know that *will* hurt you. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Precisely." She raised her glass and sipped, darting a surreptitious glance at McGrath which he missed, or seemed to, and sighed. "I'd forgotten how perfectly beastly New York can be," she observed. "All this glass and concrete. The city seems to be nothing more than a bunch of boxes standing upright in some cluttered warehouse. And it's so lonely for the contents of all these boxes, most of them at any rate."

McGrath swallowed his sauterne and protested, "Doesn't have to be, not at all. Now take yourself. A lovely, gracious lady like yourself shouldn't have to want for company. Not while I'm around at any rate. What would you say to an excursion tomorrow?"

"You're too kind, Mr. McGrath," she told him politely, secretly pleased at the way things were going. "An excursion?"

"They have these dumpy little boats, don't you know, that sail round and round the island of Manhattan like salmon looking for a place to spawn. The air's fresh and one's point of view gets a

chance to change on one of them. That is, if you can stand the tourists with their cameras and their kids all over the place. Let us go!"

They agreed to meet at nine the next morning. As Mrs. Beauvais paid and left the lounge, she heard McGrath bark "bourbon" at the waiter. The sauterne, then, had been for her sake and sensibilities.

McGrath, she decided, was probably in his early fifties. He might once have been an insurance salesman or the owner of a used car lot. He was that smooth, slick type that she had come to know so well. He wore good clothes, tasteful, not flashy. His nails were carefully manicured and his glasses gave him the look of a featherless owl. He wore elevator heels, she had noticed, although he was nearly six feet tall. *Vanity of vanities*, thought Mrs. Beauvais as she crept through the lobby.

"Mrs. Beauvais!"

It was Jerry. She turned to face him, almost girlishly pleased at his greeting. "Good afternoon, Jerry. Oh, I am glad to see you. I wonder if—"

Jerry interrupted, his forehead creased and his eyes as worried as those of an aging basset hound. "It's none of my business, I know, ma'am, but I thought I should say something anyway. That man you were talking to in the lounge—"

"Mr. McGrath, do you mean?"

"The same. I'd watch out for him, if I were you, ma'am. Oh, I got nothing against him personal, you understand. It's just that he's not what you'd call a savory type, if you take my meaning. He's been hanging around the hotel here for months now and he's got an eye, he has, for—well, for women, if you take my meaning."

Mrs. Beauvais felt a thrill of pleasure prickling her skin. "Jerry, I do indeed take your meaning. Now you must take mine. I appreciate your concern. It isn't often that one as young as you are takes the trouble to be interested in the welfare of an old woman like me. But I've been around, as they say. Yes, and I've met many Mr. McGraths in my travels. I can handle him. And myself."

"Well, okay, if you say so. Just thought I ought to mention it, is all."

"And you did well to do so. I appreciate it. It was very gallant. Now, I wonder if you'd buy me the biggest bar of soap you can find in the neighborhood. Here." She handed Jerry a dollar.

He shook his head, his eyes glowing once again and the worry lines melting in the skin of his forehead. "No need, Mrs. Beauvais. Glad to do a favor for a friend." And he was gone.

Mrs. Beauvais decided with a certain sense of relief that the world would most certainly keep turning dependably as long as there were people like Jerry in it. She went up to her room and lay down on the bed, but she could not rest. I am not a nervous woman, she told herself and the ceiling, but my funds *are* running dangerously low. I must do something and I must do it quickly. It is a simple matter of survival and practical arithmetic. The face of Ian McGrath materialized on the white ceiling and she smiled up at it. She shook a finger at it, whether in warning or coquetry, it was impossible to tell.

Picking up the telephone, she asked Room Service to send up boiled eggs, toast and tea. Then she went into the bathroom and undressed. In her silk robe, she sat on the bed with the toothbrush in her hand, read for perhaps the hundredth time the words on its side: Made in Japan. Unscrewing the bottom of the brush, she extracted the roll of bills which represented the totality of her meager resources. She spread them out on the bed, one by one, a green patchwork quilt all full of faces. Three hundred and two dollars, plus the two one dollar bills remaining in her handbag, plus four pennies—she measured her future in rectan-



gular squares of paper and copper coins.

The knock on the door startled her. She scurried to scoop up the money as she called out, "Who is it?"

"Mr. Ivory," came the muffled reply.

She was perplexed for a moment—she knew no one by that name—and then it came to her. Dropping the money on the bed, she went to the door and opened it to Jerry who thrust a giant bar of soap at her. Before she had a chance to thank him, he exclaimed, "Hey, you shouldn't leave all that cash lying around like that. It isn't safe in a place like this!"

She promised Jerry that she would put it in the hotel safe, but did not tell him that she didn't trust hotel safes any more than she trusted the stability of her own future.

When Jerry had gone and the waiter had come with her eggs and tea, she ate, treasuring each mouthful and trying not to look at the menu on the bureau that seemed to scream at her about the inflated price of boiled eggs and pots of tea. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, she got up, seized the menu and tore it into shreds which she resolutely dropped into the waste paper basket—but the eggs still tasted expensive—a gold-plated re-

past, but completely flavorless.

She was like a giddy girl on her way to her first picnic, chattering happily to McGrath as they walked down the dark shed to the short gangplank that led to the boat. The sun was high and already hot for a June morning.

"I was afraid you might not come," McGrath told her as they seated themselves on the after deck of the boat.

"Were they costly, the tickets?" she asked in a small voice.

"Magic carpet trips are always costly," McGrath remarked jovially, "but always worth it. You just bet!"

Later, she noticed his worried frown and was about to comment on it when the boat whistle shrilled and the boat moved sluggishly away from the pier. They sailed down the Hudson River into the mouth of the ocean where the Statue of Liberty stood stately and aloof, and the freighters and tankers came and went like sleek hippopotami all around them. Soon they were sailing up the East River, with hot dogs in their hands, leaning over the rail and watching the white wash of foam that the boat left behind.

McGrath, she noticed, still frowned, but when he caught her staring, he smiled and made little

jokes about the island having been a steal for just twenty-four dollars, and didn't she wish she could go skinny dipping like the boys leaping from the cliffs bordering the Harlem River as they sailed past. She pretended shock at such a suggestion but secretly it pleased her.

As do all good things, the excursion came to an end with the bumping of wood against wood as the boat docked, and they disembarked like pilgrims setting foot on a new and miraculous shore.

"I do so want to thank you, Mr. McGrath," she said. They stood on the dock in the hot sun, suddenly uncertain of each other. "I enjoyed myself. And you—your fine company," she added hastily.

"We'll go to the Bronx Zoo sometime," he told her. "I hear tell that they have centaurs and griffins and all manner of strange creatures there. You'll see."

"Oh, I would like to! I haven't seen a griffin since I was five years old. And a centaur, never!"

He took her in a taxi to a little cafe tucked into a corner of a midtown hotel. It was intimate, designed to look like a ship's cabin. There was a window that looked out on a scene painted to resemble a New England harbor.

"We're very nautical today," she told him gaily, wondering at his air of distraction.

They ordered sandwiches. McGrath had a bottle of beer and Mrs. Beauvais, her precious Pernod. McGrath whispered something to the waiter. "Watch," he ordered, then pointed at the almost real window.

She did not see the waiter flick the switch, but she did see the sky outside the window begin to darken and a cloud pass over the moon. She heard the distant rumble of thunder and the foghorns of the ships she could see so plainly begin to sound the depths of the approaching storm like hoarse witches. Then she saw the rain begin as the moon vanished completely, and real water poured down outside the window for several minutes. Suddenly the room in which they sat seemed even warmer and cozier than it had before. Minutes later, the rain lessened to a trickle, then stopped, and the foghorns fell silent. The clouds dissipated and the white disk of the moon appeared again. Mrs. Beauvais clapped her hands. "How delightful!" she crowed. "Why, that was better than centaurs or griffins. Oh, by far!"

The next afternoon they met by accident, or so it seemed to both of them, in the hotel lobby. McGrath was uneasy and, after a brief exchange of cordialities, excused himself. As he walked away from

her, Mrs. Beauvais called his name and he halted as if frozen. She went up to him and led him to a sofa where they sat down.

"Now then," she began, "something is wrong. Out with it!"

"My dear lady!" McGrath protested, feigning indignation.

"Never mind all that. What is it? What's troubling you?"

"Does it show that much?"

"And more. Well?"

"What is it always? Money, it is, that's what it always is. They are threatening to put me out of here and into the street for the want of a few coins; a few that I, unfortunately, do not at present have."

Mrs. Beauvais understood all too well. Her mind pictured the penniless leading the penniless. What in the world was one to do? "How much, Ian?"

He softened momentarily, almost as if she had petted him. She had called him by his first name and it was a signal surer than fireworks lighting up the sky. "One hundred and eighty-four dollars," he muttered. "The shylocks!"

The sum staggered her but she gave no sign. Instead, she laughed lightly. "Is that all? Why, Ian, I thought it must be thousands at least, judging by the look on your face."

He grinned sheepishly at her. "Hard times." It explained nothing.

It explained everything to her.

She leaned toward him and whispered, "I have more than enough to help you out. In my room. I'll go right up and get it. Wait here."

"I won't allow it!" he bellowed, striking a fist against his knee. "That's a disgraceful suggestion!"

"Oh, bother disgrace!" she snapped. "Now, don't you move."

The seemingly omnipresent Jerry rode up with her in the elevator, on his way to some mysterious destination. "A word to the wise," he said, his voice heavy with significance, "they say is sufficient."

Mrs. Beauvais ignored her growing impatience with his meddling and said nothing. Why is it, she wondered, that certain people feel the need to direct other people's lives, protect and patrol them? Jerry could cause her trouble if he kept interfering, but he could be helpful also. "Jerry, when you have a minute, would you—"

"Got more than a minute right now." He stepped off the elevator with her on the third floor.

She looked up and down the hall to make certain that it was quite empty. Almost whispering, she said, "Jerry, you are probably right about Ian—Mr. McGrath—but I confess I do so enjoy his company. I wonder if you could find out for me if he's respectable."



"He isn't!" Jerry insisted. "Believe me, ma'am, I know his type."

"Jerry, I've always believed that if a man has a shine on his shoes and a crease in his trousers—and if he pays his bills—it indicates clearly that he is a man of character. Now Mr. McGrath's shoes always shine brighter than the sun and his trousers are always pressed to a fault, but I wonder, does he pay his bills. Could you determine—discreetly, mind—if he pays his bill here at the hotel?"

"Sure. I'll let you know right away. It'll only take a minute or two."

"I'll be in my room. Call me on the house phone."

Jerry did call a few minutes later.

"Yes?" Mrs. Beauvais said into the phone.

"It's me."

"Well, Jerry?"

Reluctantly, "He's all paid up. No delinquency record listed for the three months he's been here."

Mrs. Beauvais smiled and nodded knowingly. To Jerry, she said, "Judge not. I just knew he was a man of character. But thank you for worrying about me. And for allaying my fears. Oh, by the way, what is the number of Mr. McGrath's room?"

"Seven-o-one."

Mrs. Beauvais hung up the phone. So, he's all paid up but he

says he needs money to pay his hotel bill! The villain! She fluffed her hair and left the room.

As she expected, Ian McGrath was not in the lobby when she arrived, but Jerry was. He marched up to her and declared, "Message for you. From *him*. Mr. McGrath. I heard him telling the desk."

"What is the message, please?"

"Mr. McGrath had to leave unexpectedly but he expects to return in less than half an hour if all goes well. He wants you to wait for him right here."

When Jerry had gone, Mrs. Beauvais made her plans. Everything was working out just as she had thought it would—as it had so often for her, with minor variations, in the long past. McGrath had been called away, had he? And she was to wait for him in the lobby, was she? *Away from her room!* Away from her room in which, she had told him plainly, she had more than enough money to meet his claimed needs. The slyboots! He had probably watched from some vantage point as she came into the lobby a few minutes ago and then run for the treasure trove—her room. Ah, so!

It was time to act. In less than five minutes, Mrs. Beauvais stood in front of the door on which the gilded numerals 701 were clumsily nailed. She knocked on the door.



As she had expected, there was no answer. For safety's sake, she knocked loudly a second time. No reply. She fumbled about inside her handbag as a maid came out of an adjoining room. "Oh, dear," she moaned, "I seem to have gone and done it again. I've forgotten to pick up my key at the desk. Well, nothing for it, I guess, but to trek all the way back down again. What the head forgets, they say, the feet will pay for." She started in the direction of the elevator. As she came abreast of the maid she winked and said, "Young lady, don't you dare grow old. When you do your wits become addled!" "Something wrong, ma'am?" the girl asked.

"My key is all. I've gone and forgotten it again. I'm in 701."

The girl glanced at her list hanging on the broom cart.

Quickly, Mrs. Beauvais volunteered, "McGrath, Mrs. McGrath."

"It says here 'Mister,'" the girl said. "Must be a mistake."

"Yes. Well."

"I can let you in, Mrs. McGrath."

The maid unlocked the door and just before Mrs. Beauvais disappeared into the room she turned and asked the girl her name.

"Mae," came the reply.

"Mae," repeated Mrs. Beauvais. "I'll mention your courtesy to the management; be sure of it."

Mae beamed at the closing door.

Inside McGrath's room, Mrs. Beauvais stood rigid for a moment, calculating. She knew that it was difficult to hide things in a hotel room under the eyes of maids and occasionally house detectives. It had taken her a long time and bitter experience to hit upon her own idea of the toothbrush as a hiding place for her money. Now where would McGrath hide his? She thought she knew. She pulled open his tiny closet, ignored the suits and shirts hanging there, and made at once for McGrath's shoes, the shoes with the elevator heels. No man who was almost six feet tall, Mrs. Beauvais guessed, wore elevator heels unless—unless it was for reasons other than adding stature to his frame. She twisted the heel of one shoe first to the right, then to the left. At last it yielded and the hollow—but not empty—space inside was revealed. Mrs. Beauvais calmly dropped the solitaire and the ruby-studded brooch into her handbag and struggled with the second shoe. It yielded a tightly coiled rope of pearls. *Excellent, almost as good as cash.* The pawnbrokers on Eighth Avenue would be delighted, and wouldn't she enjoy playing the distraught dowager fallen from her throne of riches and reduced to rags and the selling of her family heirlooms.

They would keep her going for many months. She only wished there were some way of getting whatever might be hidden in the heels of the shoes now covering McGrath's stealthy feet; but she would just have to take the here and now and let the rest go. One can't have everything, she told herself philosophically.

*Now, for the second act,* she thought. She left the room, walked swiftly down the four flights of stairs to the third floor, then moved silently along the carpeted hall until she stood outside her own door. Her practiced eye discovered the minute scratches on the door above the lock. She went back and down the steps again until she arrived, breathless, in the lobby. She fluttered, arms akimbo, across its expanse until she reached the desk where she exclaimed, "There's a man in my room! He tried to kill me!" She gasped theatrically.

At once a circus familiar to Mrs. Beauvais began. The house detective, in tweed sport coat and chinos, arrived to question her. She repeated her claim about the man in her room and saw the detective immediately summon two bellboys and race for the steps.

She waited a tense three minutes, then went up again to the third floor. Her door was open and there was the sound of a scuffle

and hoarse shouts coming from her room. Her timing, she decided, had been perfect. It was matched precisely in its perfection by her skilled guesswork concerning McGrath's movements and motives. She entered the room and loosed her carefully prepared scream.

"Everything's okay now, lady," the detective assured her hastily. "We got the guy. He used a piece of celluloid to spring the lock on your door. You're lucky you got away from him alive."

"Ian!" Mrs. Beauvais cried, in mock surprise. "You!"

Ian McGrath swore and protested loudly that he had never tried to kill anybody, least of all this old bat, but the detective snarled at him and he promptly shut his mouth and folded his empty hands.

After a thorough search of McGrath's clothing, the detective declared, "Nothing. He didn't cop a thing!"

"Oh, Ian!" Mrs. Beauvais lamented. "You were trying to steal from me when I was prepared to give you what you needed!"

The detective, aided by two bellboys, hustled McGrath out of the room. The door shut behind them and Mrs. Beauvais calmly went into the bathroom and opened her toothbrush. She poked the bills far up inside it, then took the jewelry out of her handbag and slid each

piece inside the tube. She had slight difficulty with the necklace but at last the final pearl disappeared and she screwed the bottom on again. It had all gone so perfectly, so smoothly! A celebration seemed definitely in order. She went down to the cocktail lounge.

Over her Pernod, she studied the faces of the men at the bar. She rejected them all. None was the McGrath type. She knew, because she had met them in hotels all over the country and especially here in New York City. She had them all neatly catalogued as to type. Some started their swindles with talk of stocks, some with hints of wildcat oil wells that would bring in a veritable flood of black gold—if only there were proper sources of financing available. Others, the penny-ante confidence men like McGrath, used charm as their key to a woman's cache of cash and jewels, but she, the professional victim, had always successfully fleeced them all. It was a rough game but an exciting one. It kept her on her toes—inventing, imagining, storytelling. Celine Beauvais, indeed, thought the woman of so many different names and so many strange histories as she sat and sipped her drink. She prided herself on the one new touch she had used this time, the one about the ten troubles. She had read the

Coolidge quote somewhere recently and it had just popped out. It had added a certain spice to her game with McGrath. She had warned him to watch out for her, practically declared herself his tenth trouble, but he had been too slow to understand.

She paid the waiter and left the lounge, the tang of anise on her tongue. At the desk, she told the room clerk that she was checking out within the hour. She was moving, she told him righteously, to a respectable hotel where a lady could be assured of safety. She would expect a refund for the unused portion of her advance payment. He nodded, and murmured his apologies, and offered her a faint smile.

When she was almost completely packed, she called the desk and asked them to send Jerry up for her luggage. She would miss his fresh, eager face and his concern for her, she decided. Sadly she admitted to herself that she needed the concern of someone like Jerry. Of course, he was much too young, but an older version of him. Then, perhaps, she would be able to give up playing the cat to so many mice in order to stay on the credit side of life's ledger. Remembering that she was supposed to be Celine Beauvais, she raised her eyebrows and told the empty room, "C'est la

vie! Toujours et toujours, la vie!"

She was about to open the medicine cabinet when the knock sounded on her door. She scampered out of the bathroom and opened the door to confront a stooped ancient, posing as a bell-boy. *Boy!* He was seventy if he was a day!

"I told them to send young Jerry," she said coldly.

"Can't do that," the old man said. "Whippersnapper up and quit just half an hour ago. Cleared clean out, he did. No notice or nothing."

"Oh?"

"Yep. Left something for you though. You *are* Mrs. Beauvais?"

"I am."

"This." He thrust a small package wrapped in brown paper and tied with string into her hand.

She felt a wave of warmth envelop her. How very nice! A parting gift from Jerry! The paper dropped from her hands, and a toothbrush glared up at her from its plastic prison beneath the sticker that said 69¢. "I don't under-

stand," she murmured—and then she did. She ran into the bathroom and tore open the door of the medicine cabinet. Her hair spray and her nail polish and her lilac dusting powder were all there. Everything was—except her toothbrush! She thought she was going to faint.

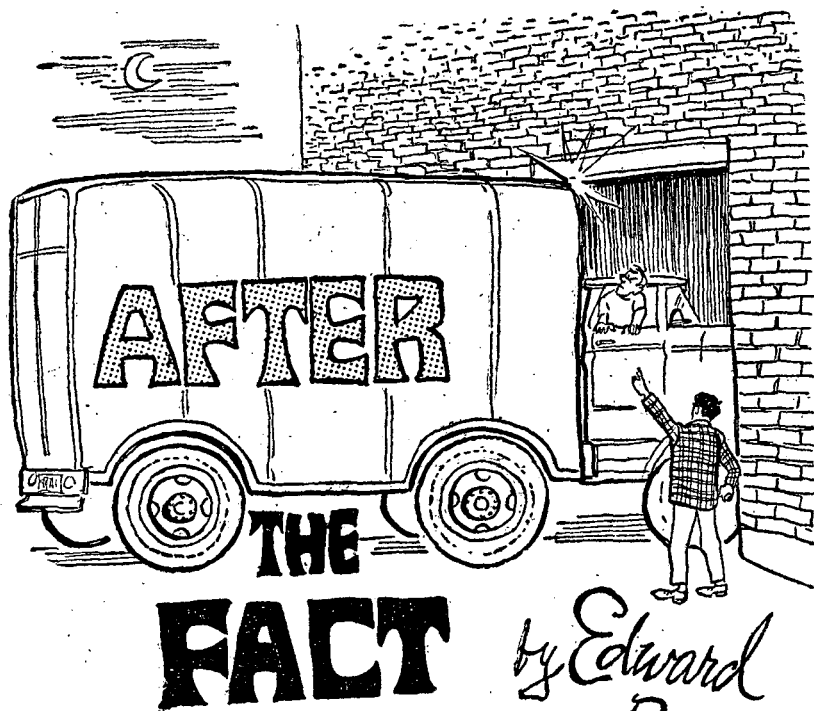
A voice that seemed to be coming from the bottom of the sea reached her finally. It was the bell-boy speaking. "There's a note, Mrs. Beauvais. On the wrapping right here."

She came out of the bathroom like a sleepwalker and numbly took the paper he held out to her. Scrawled in pencil on the brown paper were the words, "*McGrath couldn't figure out where to look. After you all left, I did. Adios. Jerry.*"

Not for a second had she suspected *him* of being *her* tenth trouble. Why, she thought in amazement, I'm just as bad a bungler as McGrath! Well, something, *someone* would turn up before the month was out.



*Apparently for every man there is a predestined instant in time when he must pause to assess his own soul.*



**THE  
FACT**

*by Edward  
D.  
Hoch*

**T**HE STREETS were silent following the midnight rain, and from where Tragger stood in the shadows there was nothing to be heard but the occasional splash of a late driver hitting the puddle at the end of the next block. It was a dark night, with storm clouds still obscuring

the stars. On this corner, a poorly lit side street, the main source of illumination was the traffic signal that blinked red-green-amber in a

AFTER THE FACT

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monotonous sixty-second cycle.

Tragger heard the truck a full ten seconds before he saw the flashlight signal from Mason's car in the next block. Then he saw Jackie Fritz swing the sedan into the intersection and stall it there. The truck driver hit the brakes and started to swing around the sudden obstacle, but already Tragger was onto the high running board, shoving the snub-nosed revolver through the open window on the driver's side.

"Put on your brakes and shove over," he said sharply. "I'm driving now."

"Like hell you . . ."

Tragger lashed out at the driver's head with his gun hand, clipping him along the side of the scalp. Then he yanked open the door and forced himself into the driver's seat, keeping the gun pointed in the direction of the stunned man.

"You won't get hurt," he said. "Not if you behave."

Already Jackie Fritz had pulled open the other door and was toppling the driver into the street. The whole thing took less than a minute. They were an experienced team.

Tragger wheeled the big truck to the left, into the side street, and drove straight ahead for three blocks. He didn't bother looking

back; he knew Jackie would have driven the sedan out of sight already, taking the truck driver to some remote point where he could be dumped far enough from the nearest phone.

Tragger turned another corner, drove for half a block, and then paused before a darkened warehouse to give the horn three quick beeps. Almost at once the red door swung up, and Tragger saw Mike Fritz, Jackie's brother, waving him in. He was halfway through the entrance when he heard the overhead door scraping against the roof of the truck. He stepped on the brake and cursed.

"Not enough clearance," Mike Fritz said, putting words to the obvious.

"How much do we need?"

"Just an inch or so."

Tragger leaned out of the side window. "Let some air out of all the tires. That'll do it."

Mike hurried to obey, and in a few more minutes the truck was safely inside.

Tragger sighed with relief. "That's it—\$75,000 in bonded bourbon whiskey."

Mike Fritz nodded. "A good night's work. Let's start unloading it so we can ditch the truck."

Presently Mason arrived in his car to help them, and then Jackie Fritz and his boys came. "What'd

you do with the truck driver?" Mike asked his brother.

"Tapped him on the head and left him under the railroad bridge. He'll sleep for an hour or so."

Tragger didn't like that part, and he told them so. "You'll kill somebody one of these days."

Jackie Fritz shrugged his narrow shoulders. He was younger than his brother and at times almost effeminate in his actions. "I didn't hurt him any worse than you did when you cracked him across the head," he mumbled.

His brother Mike, ten years older and thirty pounds heavier, jumped off the back of the truck. "Knock it off and get the rest of this whiskey unloaded. We haven't got all night!"

They finished storing the whiskey and Mason drove the truck out to dispose of it. He'd park it on the street somewhere, fairly close by, because they couldn't risk being seen with it now. After he'd gone, Tragger went out to pull the door closed, and noticed the red paint scraped off its face. He didn't mention it to the Fritz brothers or the others.

"Get the stuff under cover," Mike said. "It'll be a few days before we can start unloading it."

Tragger sat down on one of the wooden chairs and lit a cigarette. "How about my share, Mike?"

"Don't you worry. You'll get it."

"Tonight."

"What're you talkin' about?"

"Five thousand. Tonight. I know you've got it. They already gave you a twenty percent down payment on the stuff."

"Hell, you can wait a couple days just like the rest of us!"

"I don't want to wait," Tragger said, smiling slightly, without humor. "I want to move on. Tonight."

Mason had come back from ditching the truck, and was getting a card game going with Jackie and the others. They were all waiting for the same thing, money, but only Tragger knew that it wouldn't be coming.

Mike Fritz ran a hand through his graying hair. "What's the rush?"

"Look, Mike, you couldn't have pulled this without me and you know it. I'm the best truck hopper in the business."

"Sure you are. Nobody says you're not."

"Then give me the money."

"It wouldn't be fair to the others," Mike decided.

Tragger motioned him over against the wall, where Jackie and Mason and the rest couldn't hear. "What have you got, ten thousand?" Mike didn't answer, but Tragger knew his figure was cor-

rect. He hurried on. "All right, let's take five each and blow this place. Before the cops get here."

"Cops?" Mike's mouth was hanging open.

"If they've got a brain among them they're going to notice the air's down in those tires. And they're going to notice the red paint that scraped off the door onto the roof of that truck. They're going to figure what happened and come looking for a warehouse in this area with a red door exactly as high as the truck."

"You shoulda been a detective, Tragger," Mike Fritz said. "And what do I tell my brother after the cops grab him?" He aimed a balled right fist at Tragger's jaw without warning, but Tragger had eight good years on the man. He dodged the fist and put Mike away with two lightning-fast jabs, slid him quietly down the cinder-block wall to the concrete floor, then went quickly through his pockets.

He took the whole ten thousand, because he didn't believe in any sort of honor among thieves.

Dave Tragger had been operating the gas station in Little Falls for nearly five years on the day he received the telephone call from New York. He put down the oil can he'd been using and came into the office to answer it, accepting

the greasy phone from the pimply-faced kid who helped him wash cars on Saturday mornings.

"Dave Tragger here. Can I help you?"

"Tragger, this is Mason. Remember?"

He felt a sudden chill run down his back. "I think you've got the wrong party."

"Like hell! Look, I'm calling all the way from New York, and I don't have time for games. Mike Fritz knows where you are. He's sent somebody to take care of you."

Dave Tragger wasn't really surprised at the message. He'd been expecting it, somehow, for all these years—ever since that night when the police raided the warehouse and killed Mike's kid brother, Jackie. Mike might have stood still for the ten thousand, but not for his brother's life.

"You've got the wrong person," Tragger repeated. "I've never been east."

"You crazy fool, you didn't even change your name! Did you *want* him to find you?"

Yes, perhaps that was the answer; perhaps all these years he had wanted to be found. "I'm sorry," he said aloud. "Wrong man." He hung up the phone and stood for a moment leaning against the wall, his head pressed against the firm coldness of the plastic instru-



ment to suppress the pounding.

How many years was it? Hardly any, as a man's life is judged, and yet the days back east might have been a lifetime away. It had been a decade since Tragger last jumped a truck, hijacked a load of whiskey or a shipment of perfume. He walked over to the sink in one corner of the station, and stood staring at the face in the mirror. So they were coming at last; Mike Fritz's boys, after all these years.

He washed the grease from his hands and decided to go home early.

Carol was in the kitchen, feeding the baby, when he came in from the garage. "You're home early. What's the trouble?"

"No trouble." She was blonde and young and almost beautiful, and she'd never known how things were back east. He had been a different person back east, and that person no longer existed.

"You're not sick, are you?"

"No. I just felt like coming home early, so I left the station with the kid. He can handle things for an hour."

She took the baby to his crib and then came back. She was not the most intelligent woman he had ever known, nor the most beautiful, but when he'd come west and started at the gas station, she had seemed somehow a symbol of the

new life. They had their circle of friends now, and a middle-class life that wasn't at all bad. During the week he sometimes worked on trucks, actually repairing them and sending them out on the road intact. On Sundays—most Sundays—he even went to church.

"Something's bothering you, Dave. I haven't been your wife for these years without knowing that something's bothering you."

Yes; she knew that much. There was no point in denying it. "Nothing, really. I had a phone call today from a fellow I knew a long time ago, back east. A friend of his is coming out to see me."

"Trouble of some sort?"

"No, no." He lit a cigarette, too aware of his nervous fingers as the match flame danced away from the tip. "You know how it is with things like that. Like school reunions, you're always nervous about seeing the past again too close."

"It's a woman, isn't it?"

"No, no!" He put his arms around her. "Nothing like that!" She had always been so soft and innocent. "Just a man, coming out here to see me on some unfinished business."

Later, after he had eaten, Tragger went out to the garage where he had a little workbench. He rummaged around in his toolbox and came up at last with the snub-nosed

.38 revolver wrapped in an oily rag. He hadn't examined it in years, but it was still in perfect condition.

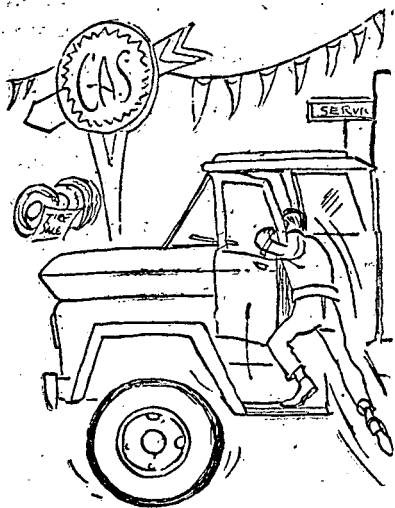
While Carol was busy with the baby, he slipped it into the pocket of the jacket he'd be wearing to work the next morning.

Nothing happened for five days. Tragger kept the pistol close at hand, often in the deep side pocket of his baggy overalls or even in his belt when he had his jacket covering it. He kept a careful eye on strangers, especially male customers traveling alone in cars with eastern license plates. If someone were coming, he figured it would be from New York or Chicago, though he didn't overlook the possibility of the man having flown out and rented a car.

On the fifth day a truck rolled in for an oil change. It was a big semi from a furniture company in the next county, and Tragger knew the driver slightly. He'd gotten the reputation of being a good man with trucks, and drivers often brought their minor jobs to him rather than bother with the company mechanic, even if they had one. This time, while the driver was getting a drink from the machine, Tragger had started working, not really paying much attention to the truck itself until it started to move.

"The brakes!" the driver man-

aged to yell, and Tragger dropped the open oil can as he leaped for the window of the truck's cab. Linking an arm around the door, he pulled himself up to the narrow running board, then yanked open the door with his free hand and finally slammed on the brake.



"That was fast," the driver said as he hurried over.

Tragger was mopping up the spilled oil. "It had to be. Watch those brakes next time. If it reached the street there'd have been one hell of a crash."

Finally, as the truck pulled out and Tragger walked back to the office, a voice behind him said, "Just like the old days, huh?"

His hand was on the gun and

he was turning fast when he recognized Mason, standing half out of sight against the white metal wall of the station. "That's a damn good way to get yourself killed!" he said, relaxing a bit but not completely. The sight of Mason, balding and thinner but still the sly one, brought back too many memories. Suddenly it was a decade ago, back east, and the whiskey was running.

"I thought you'd be glad to see me," Mason said, following him into the cluttered office that seemed filled to overflowing with oil cans and road maps and greasy cloths. "I came to help you."

"How?" Tragger asked. He didn't like seeing the man. He didn't like any of it.

"Mike has somebody on his way here. I might recognize the guy."

"Yeah."

"Hell, I was always your friend, Tragger. You can trust me."

Tragger flopped onto the scarred wooden chair and propped one foot against a half-open desk drawer. The station furniture was all cheap stuff he'd picked up when an insurance company went out of business down the street. It was good enough; most of the customers stayed in their cars anyway. He stared up at Mason, seeing only a middle-aged little man with a weak chin and shifty eyes. "How

do I know? You might feel the same as Mike Fritz; that I skipped with the money and left you for the cops, that I was responsible for his brother's death."

"Hell, Jackie pulled a gun on the cops. It was a stupid move."

"Is Mike still inside?"

Mason nodded his little head. "Got two more years to go. They turned down his parole. I just got out a few months back myself. Second offender."

"How'd Mike find out where I was?"

"Somebody passing through recognized you and got word to him. He's had a price on your head all these years, since Jackie got it."

"And you're here to save me." Tragger was conscious of the pistol in his left pocket, not far from his casual hand.

Mason had been standing all along, as if ready to jump at the slightest sound. Now he seemed to relax a bit and sat down on the only other chair. "We always got along, Tragger."

"Maybe you're the one Mike sent."

"Would I have called you then, to warn you first?"

"Maybe you wanted to hear my voice before you made the trip all the way out here. Maybe you wanted to prepare the way, so I'd greet you as a friend."

"I'm here to help you, Tragger. In fact, I'll do more than help you. I've got a little deal I can cut you into."

"I'm through truck hopping, Mason. I'm a married man with a family."

"No trucks, no trucks! This is something I heard about inside. A protection racket for dry cleaners. We shake them down for money—fire insurance, we call it. The ones that don't pay, well, we take them some dry cleaning . . . an old woman's dress with a little fire bomb hidden in the shoulder padding, a pair of men's pants with the stuff in the cuffs. The heat from the drier sets the stuff off, and a lot of customers' clothes get burned too."

"There aren't many dry cleaners in this town."

"No, but what about Los Angeles, huh? Or Las Vegas? Where the money is."

"Not for me," Tragger said, but he was beginning to believe the man. He stood up suddenly. "Look, Mason. Let me check you, okay? To see if you've got a gun?"

"Huh? Sure, go ahead! Think I'm crazy enough to take a chance on going back in as a third offender?"

Tragger ran his hands quickly over the man's body, but there was no gun, not even a knife. "All

right," he said. "For now, anyway."

"Did you ever know me to cool a guy, Tragger? In all our years together? Mike could offer me all the money in the world and I couldn't come out here to gun you down. You should know that."

Somehow Tragger did know it. He had nothing to fear from this middle-aged little man; nothing at all, but he kept the gun in his pocket anyway.

"All right," he said finally, again. "But I'm not interested in your dry cleaning deal. It's not for me."

"What have you got to stay here for? Just waiting for Mike's guy to find you, waiting for that bullet with your name on it?"

"I'll take my chances."

Mason sighed and got to his feet. "I'll be around a couple of days. Got me a room downtown. I'll be out to see you again."

"All right."

He watched the little man go, watched him and wondered, because somehow the seeds of his own destruction seemed to rest on those sloping shoulders. He had nothing to fear from Mason, and yet . . .

Carol greeted him with a kiss, as she always did when she'd been spending too much money. He listened to the usual day's routine of the baby's escapades, her shopping

adventures, the wonderful dress she'd found on sale, but he listened this night with only half an ear. His mind was elsewhere, back in that other life when he'd waited on darkened streets for the trucks to come; waited for fifty thousand, or a hundred thousand, there for the taking.

No, he hadn't escaped completely from that life. He'd only submerged it beneath the dull gloss of a gas station and a home and a family. Mason had brought it all back, just as he'd brought back the necessity of the gun from the garage.

"You're quiet tonight," she said once.

"I'm thinking."

"About that man you said was coming?"

"Yes. About him."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Just understand," he said. "Understand it, whatever happens."

Tragger was getting ready for bed when the telephone rang downstairs. It was Mason, out of breath and excited. "He's here; Tragger! I just saw him at the hotel! I know he's the one!"

Tragger felt the old chill on his spine. "All right," he said quietly.

"Be careful."

"Yes."

"I'll see you tomorrow. At the

station. Watch yourself, Tragger."

"Yes."

When he came back to the bedroom, Carol asked, "Who was that calling at this hour?"

"Just a guy I know."

"The man who was coming?"

"In a way." He turned out the light and climbed into bed.

"Dave, I'm scared. I've never seen you like this."

"It'll work out," he said.

He pretended to sleep, but for a long time he stayed awake, listening to the trees, and to the occasional footfalls on the sidewalk outside.

The next morning he wore the gun in his waistband where it would be very close to his fingers. It was there when Mason appeared, walking quickly in the filtered sunlight. Tragger watched him coming, his fingers only inches away from the weapon, wondering if he should use it now and end this terrible suspense; but no, he had nothing to fear from Mason, nothing physical, at least.

"How are you, Tragger?"

"All right, I suppose. Where's your friend?"

"He left before me. He's got a car but I didn't get a good look at it. What do you want me to do?"

"Keep out of sight," Tragger said. His eyes fastened on the little man's coat.

"Look, no guns!" Mason opened the coat for Tragger to see. "Some-day you'll learn you can trust me."

"Keep out of sight," Tragger told him again.

He went about his morning tasks, gassing up a few cars, watching while the cigarette and drink machines were filled. The kid who helped wash cars came by, and Tragger put him to work in back. Then, a little before eleven, he had three customers at once.

One was a heavy-set man with Indiana plates, who left his car to use the rest room. Tragger had finished the other two, careful to keep them both in sight, when he heard Mason suddenly yell from the office.

"Tragger! Behind you! It's him!"

Tragger whirled, going into a crouch, and saw the heavy-set man coming out of the rest room, his hand inside his jacket. There was no time for second thoughts. His own gun was out, and he fired two quick shots, hitting the man in the stomach and chest.

He saw the startled look on the

man's face as he went down, the billfold flopping from his hand, and knew in that instant what he'd done . . . what Mason had done to him.

There was just a glimpse of Mason as the thin man vanished into the gathering crowd. Tragger could have tried a quick shot at him, but somehow the fight had gone out of him. He'd started by not trusting Mason, and then gone on to let himself be set up for this—with Mason fingering the first likely-looking person who drove in for gas. He wondered vaguely how much Mike Fritz had paid for it.

"Do you want to make a statement?" the detective asked him.

"Not right now."

"The fellow's a salesman for a shoe company. If he dies, you'll be facing a murder rap."

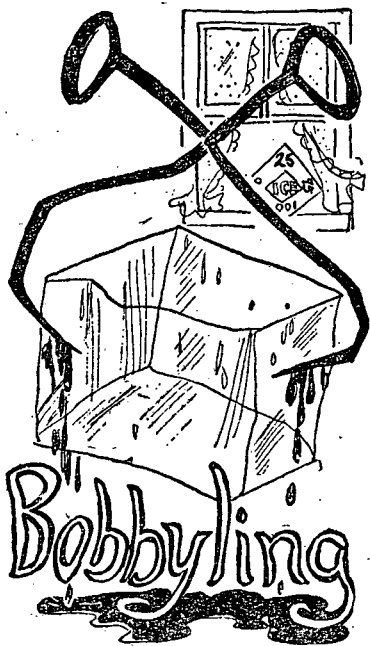
"I know," Tragger said.

"Why'd you shoot him?"

"It's a long story. I thought he was someone else." He stared off at the trees and thought about Carol and the baby. "Or maybe I just thought I was someone else."



*Malapropishly speaking, unpleasant incidents are properly "illiterated" from memory.*



"Oh, the iceman is a nice man  
But of just one thing I'm sure.  
There's something in his business  
That affects his tempera-  
ture . . ."

**I**T WAS an old song I had learned in college, along with "Bill Bailey", "Clementine", and a dozen others. I was singing in my shower when

my small son pushed his head inside the curtain.

"Daddy, what's an iceman?"

Of course he would not know. How many years has it been since any of us has seen an iceman?

After I stepped out of the shower, I patiently explained to him that lost phenomenon from what he calls "the old days", thinking at first just of the generic term, remembering tired old jokes about redheaded children, but when I spread my hands to explain the size of a twenty-five pound block of ice, something I



had not let myself remember, for years, came to mind; the size, the sharpness, the danger in a pair of ice tongs; and one specific iceman, one specific summer.

I shivered and grabbed my towel against the sudden chill that seemed to have sprung up there in the bathroom.

"There weren't any ice cubes?" my son said. "What did you do?"

"We used something called an ice pick. Very sharp."

His interest fading, he turned away and started fiddling with the stopper in the basin, but the damage was done. I was remembering what I had tried so long to forget; remembering both as an adult—and as the child that was—doubtless the horror.

There are moments in a lifetime when a corner is turned, moments one can remember more clearly than much that passes in between; such as the moment I was ready to be married; the moment before that, in college, when I stopped playing and began studying like the devil; the moment in high school when I discovered girls. The earliest turn of a corner, however, came somewhere in that pre-school period, before I went to live with my grandparents, when the happy Fridays disappeared.

There was a very small icebox

in the very small house which was the first home I can remember. Perhaps I was born there, I'm not sure. The house in that small Minnesota town is part of that hazy memory of earliest childhood, sitting in a high chair with the floor so far below; the feel of a new furry toy; the clock that ticked so loudly when it was dark but only whispered by daylight.

My mother was like that clock, usually so quiet spoken, but when angry she could scream piercingly—most often after I was in bed—the way she screamed one night in the kitchen doorway, the ice pick in her hand.

My father was a salesman and was on the road five days a week. My earliest recollection was that Friday meant Father. In the very long ago, Friday was a happy time. I can dimly remember Mother singing while she bathed me. I can remember sitting in the high chair and watching her get out the best white table cloth and the silverware from the oak box on the sideboard. I can remember the smell of dinner cooking, and the way she and my father hugged and kissed, the bouquet of flowers; and always, the new toy for me. How wonderful it had been to sit there, clutching the new toy, and watching. What a wrench it had been when Mother carried



me off to bed. I didn't want to miss anything.

I was young enough to fall asleep quickly. Young and secure and full of Friday night contentment, it was rather like having a small slice of Christmas, once a week.

The rest of life was very simple. My mother must have been dreadfully lonesome. Very seldom were there callers. I can't remember my mother having friends, but I can remember being pushed in a little cart to the grocery and the laundry and the drug store and the other little shops, and later making the same rounds with my small hand firmly clutched in her slender one.

The postman was very important. He came twice a day, a round-shouldered gaunt old man who held letters at the end of his nose to read the addresses. He went through a game each day of pretending to look for mail for me and always finished by saying, "You're lucky, sonny, most of it is bills!" He was polite and apologetic and sympathetic when there was no mail for my mother. She waited for that mailman with such anticipation and excitement that it was contagious. I waited, too, my nose pressed to the glass, never quite sure what we were expecting, or why it was important.

Next to me in the window was the iceman's card, the sides of the square indicating 25, 50, 75, 100 pounds. Ours was always set at 25. From that card I first learned to recognize certain numbers.

I suppose there were several icemen during the earliest years of my life; I can't remember them clearly. They were big men, of course, who told me to get out of the way, and my mother was always upset by the tracks they made across her kitchen floor. Mother was a fastidious housekeeper, everything clean and in its place. I remember the shock of the roughness of her hand when she slapped me, if I put my fingers into my food, or ran them across a steamy window pane.

I have no pictures of her, and my memory of her is frosted over, as lacking in dimension as a medieval painting. She emerges less visual than tactile—the firm way she hung onto my hand when we walked, the contrast between purr and screech that was her voice, and a flowerlike scent—the scent that never left our bathroom.

On that first unhappy Friday, I was old enough for my mother to allow me to put the silverware on the table, to set a place for myself with my own miniature set of spoon and fork. Her hair was full of the perfume, and she was hum-

ming away at a completely different tune from what the radio was playing.

I was learning to tell time, a little. When I wasn't at the front window, my eyes were on the clock. Daddy usually arrived by six. By six-fifteen I was, of course, anxious.

"Timmy, don't press your nose against the window like that! You can't see anything, and you'll get it dirty!"

True, there was only my blurred reflection superimposed against the spring night. Spring was a miracle in Minnesota, all green and wet and unexpected. I wished I could be allowed to sit on the front step to wait for Daddy, but Mother never, never let me outside after dark.

By six-thirty Mother was clock watching, too. By seven o'clock she had turned down the oven and turned up the radio for weather reports—but the weather was perfect.

I had been announcing that I was hungry for quite some time so, finally, she took the dinner out of the oven and fixed me a plate. In spite of my hunger I didn't think it was fun to eat alone, but she said she would wait for Daddy.

When my bedtime came I protested, loudly, but Mother was

firmer than usual. She was frowning and her mouth was set in an ugly way, and when I started to cry, she spanked me and dragged me into the bedroom.

I lay in the dark, infinitely sorry for myself, feeling a strangeness in the spring night. The radio was so very loud; the odor of dinner still permeated the little house. Everything was different in a way I could not understand. Twisting, turning, whimpering to myself, I fell asleep at last.

Some time later I was awakened by a compound of noises: the slam of the front door, heavy footsteps, a growly kind of mumbling, and Mother's voice at its shrillest peak. Could that be Daddy?"

Curiosity outweighed my fear; curiosity and a perhaps instinctive impulse to face the mystery. I climbed out of my bed and opened the door to my room.

They had not heard me. They were standing near the kitchen door, looking at each other very hard. My father's shoulders were bent above her. He took a step forward, an uncertain, wobbly step. There was another odor, stronger than the perfume.

My mother moved backward, reached to the top of the icebox. She stood there with the ice pick only a few inches from my father's face. She screamed, "Don't



you touch me, you drunken bum!"

I made no sound. I couldn't. I was frozen in the doorway, looking at two strangers. For the first time, I suppose, I was really aware of myself as a being, Timmy Winant, disconnected from the two creatures opposite, alone in all the world. I was afraid of both of them, could not conceive of running to either. The protection of their arms was something in the past.

I turned and tiptoed back to my bed. Later I heard my mother come in, knew she was bending over me. She had found the open door. She knew I had been up. I

lay very still, with my eyes closed, and after a while she went away.

Late the next day when my father finally woke up, he opened his suitcase and gave me the usual present. It wasn't much, wasn't even wrapped—a tiny toy auto. I had a dozen of them, one exactly like this new one. There were no flowers for Mother.

Daddy said he didn't feel like going out to play with me in the yard, the way he usually did on Saturdays. It was a dreadful, lonely, silent weekend. My parents didn't even talk, except in little bits, mostly about food. When Mother went into the bedroom in the afternoon she said to Daddy,

"You watch him for a while," in such a cross way that I felt she was as angry with me as she was with Daddy.

Monday came, the same as any other Monday, and I was ready to forget the weekend as a kind of nightmare. I didn't guess the worst—that the weekends that followed would be repetitions.

Some Fridays my father did not come home at all. Those weeks there was sure to be mail, and one of our excursions would be to the bank.

My mother had stopped smiling, had stopped playing with me. She would clean house, day after day, even washing windows and taking the stove apart, and scrubbing and waxing the floor. She was always busy, busy, busy. When she did stop, she would sit in a chair next to the window and stare out, the way I did.

One Friday morning we were sitting there, waiting for the mailman, when all at once she threw her arms around me.

"I don't care!" Her voice was sharp and angry, even as she hugged me. "I don't care how much it costs. If the money comes, I'm going to buy it for you. You deserve some fun, Timmy! This time *Mother* is going to buy you a present."

Before then, she never had.

There was a strict rule, when we went into stores, that I must never ask for anything. "Your Daddy spoils you enough," she would say, but the expression had little meaning for me. Somehow I confused it with the food in the refrigerator over which she wrinkled her nose and said, "It's spoiled. We do need more ice."

The postman brought a check, and soon after we went downtown. When we came out of the bank I saw that her eyes were bright and that she was half-smiling. We walked down the block to a big store where I'd never been before, and she bought me the most wonderful thing I ever had seen or dreamed of—a little red wagon, small enough for me to pull.

I was allowed to pull it to the other stores, even to put some of the groceries in it and pull it home. I forgot to wonder about my mother, or to wonder about anything. The whole world of my emotions became absorbed in that little red four-wheeled object.

It was summer and I could stay outside most of the day. Not only could I drag the wagon around and around our small yard, but I was allowed to take it as far as the corner, as long as I never, never actually crossed the street to the water's edge. Too, I must

promise that no other child, should I meet a child, be allowed to touch it. There were no children in our block, so that rule was not a difficult one to keep. Once I did see a boy coming toward me and I turned and ran home.

Mother always had taught me not to talk to strange children. She used to tell me, time after time, "Someday we'll have a nice house in a nice neighborhood where there are nice children and you will have lots of friends. Now, Mommy is your friend."

I named the wagon "Bobby" and I'm afraid I talked to it.

Summer galloped on the heels of spring, in Minnesota. All at once the world was oven-hot, and I was dressed in only sunsuit and sandals. I spent a lot of time standing at the end of the street, looking over at the cool green river. One wonderful afternoon my father had taken me across the street, and sat with me, looking down at the occasional fish. He had promised me that when I was older he would take me fishing.

The ice card was up in the window every day. Our box would hold only the minimum twenty-five pounds, and overnight the ice would disappear.

There was one thunderstorm—not enough of a storm to make it cool—but while the rain kept me

from my beloved red wagon I conceived the game of lining my miniature automobiles along the windowsill, pretending that it was a road following a river.

I abandoned them when Mother called me to dinner, and it was not until the next morning that she discovered I had knocked the ice card out of the window; not until it was long after the hour when the iceman would have come.

Mother looked despairingly into the box. I again heard that word "spoiled", and then she cried, "Timmy, I have it! We'll take your wagon and go to the icehouse!"

It was a red-letter day for me. We not only went right down by the river, but we followed it, along a bumpy little path for a long way, until we came to the barnlike structure where the ice was kept. Mother explained how in the winter, when the river froze, blocks of ice were cut up and put deep away, so deep that they would keep through the warm weather.

She knocked on the door and an old man came and brought us the cake of ice. Mother was so pleased that it was cheaper than when it was delivered that she said, "Maybe we'll do this again, Timmy." I was delighted, but the trip home, uphill, was so much

more difficult that she changed her mind and disappointed me by saying, "Well, maybe we'll do it again, but only if we have to."

One morning, just as I was finishing breakfast, there was a knock on the door, such a very soft knock that Mother said as she went to the door, "Who on earth can that be, so early in the morning!"

It was the iceman—but a new one, a young one. He had very black curly hair and black, laughing eyes, and the block of ice did not make him bend his shoulders in the slightest.

Mother seemed more surprised than I.

"Bob Ealing!" she exclaimed. "It is Bob Ealing, isn't it?"

He smiled and nodded, but when she just stood there, blocking his way, he said, "Mind if I put this down, ma'am?"

Mother turned around then and opened the icebox, having a lot of difficulty with the handle, and her face was all shiny, as it had been on the old Friday nights.

"I saw you play when you were in high school. It seems years ago. Are you still playing?"

He slipped the ice into the box, banged the door shut, then said, "Yes, ma'am. Guess I'll be playing football long as they'll let me."

"Then this is just your summer

job, to make some expense money."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Don't call me ma'am, please! It makes me feel so old. I'm Lillian Winant."

Looking down at me, he said, "How do you do, Mrs. Winant."

It was the strangest morning! The next thing, she was giving him a cup of coffee and they were sitting at the kitchen table. Mother was doing most of the talking, all her words interspersed with little giggles. Then, all at once, she turned around to me and said, "Timmy, why don't you go outside and play with your wagon?"

Always before, I had asked first, but that morning I was not as anxious as usual. We didn't have many callers, and I liked this Bobbyling, a grown man who played something called football.

"Timmy, please!" she went on. "Mr. Ealing and I want to talk."

So I went outside.

After that Mother made sure the ice card went up every morning, and every morning it was the same pattern. Sometimes Bobbyling would come over and start to talk to me, but Mother always interrupted us. I think he wanted to make friends with me, but she didn't want him to, so I did what she said. I was glad enough to have her smiling again. I spent more and more time down by the

river—as close as I dared—alone.

Once I awoke in the night and heard voices. I called to Mother several times and when she came I asked, "Is Daddy home?"

She slapped me hard and said, "Of course not! Go back to sleep!"

That took a while, but I knew I had heard a man's voice, and other noises familiar to weekends.

Then one morning there was a loud knock and it wasn't Bobbyling at the door, but one of the other icemen. Mother looked awfully disappointed, and asked, "Where's Mr. Ealing? Is he ill?" and the man looked at her sort of sidelong and said, "He's taking care of the icehouse."

That was a Friday and Daddy came home. He brought me a new ball. I asked him if it were a football, and he said no and asked me where I'd heard about football.

"There's a man. An iceman. His name is Bobbyling."

"A nice man named what?"

"Timmy, wash your hands for supper!" Mother's voice was very cross. "Hurry!"

I ran to obey.

She wasn't a bit nice to Daddy and he had brought her the biggest bunch of flowers you ever saw. She did a lot of talking about money and a new house and Daddy kept saying over and over,

"But, Lillian, we can't afford it." Then she started sorting Daddy's laundry, and came across a red stain on the collar of one of his shirts. She ran across the room and showed it to him, and then she threw it on the pile of laundry and went off to the bedroom, slamming the door behind her, and I could hear her crying.

The next few days are all run together in my memory. Mother was jumpy and cross and hardly talked to me at all, and the weather got hotter and hotter.

One Saturday morning—no Daddy, the letter with the money had come the day before—I came in for a drink of water and saw all the food from the icebox on the kitchen table. Mother had left the door open the way she never did, particularly in summer, and she was scrubbing the inside of the box. She'd even taken out the block of ice and put it in the sink. She was working so hard that her face was all red and wet.

She handed me a peanut butter sandwich for lunch and I ate it, watching her put all the food back into the box. Then she looked at the little piece of ice and for the first time in days she smiled, but it was a funny, not nice smile, and she said, "This afternoon we'll have to go to the icehouse."

It was much cooler down by the river, but I wasn't as happy as I'd expected to be. Mother's hand was hot against mine, and she didn't talk to me or even look at me—like she was angry with me for something, but I knew I had done nothing wrong.

Bobbyling came to the door of the icehouse. He looked very cross. For a minute they stood, just staring at each other, not saying a word. Mother let go of my hand.

"You wait here, Timmy," she said, then went into the icehouse and closed the door.

I was puzzled and disappointed, but I waited. After a few minutes I got fidgety and began looking around. I was very close to the river, closer than I'd ever been since the day with Daddy. I left my red wagon and went over to the river bank.

It was cooler there under the trees. There were lots of fish, and dragonflies, and even one little frog, who looked like a tiny man, an elf under a leaf, like the picture in my fairy tale book. I sat very still, watching, fascinated by the way he bent his legs and jumped. I tried bending my knees in the same position, but the grass on the bank was slippery.

That moment is very clear. It is the last I remembered clearly for

a long while, because all at once the river had swallowed me up and the current was dragging me and my face was going in and out of the slimy green water so rapidly that my screams were all garbled up, not sounding like myself at all, and then everything got very black.

My near drowning; and all that followed, was never discussed during my childhood. I was raised by my paternal grandparents who had a big farm and many animals and a hired man with a family of children. I was kept so busy being normal that the early years, though not exactly erased, were smudged down to a caricature of a memory, but I remember one scene in that same little house: my father carrying me into the living-room to face a circle of people; a policeman, standing by my mother; a strange man and woman.

"They pulled you out of the river, Timmy. They saved your life," my father said.

Daddy had come home, on a Saturday! What had happened? Why were all these people in our livingroom?

Then my father said, "We want you to tell us, son, what you remember before you fell into the river."

I tried hard. I remembered the



fish and the little jumping elf. Then the rest began to come back.

"My wagon? Where's my wagon?"

"It's right there, Timmy." Daddy pointed, and there it was, in its usual place by the front door. "We found it by the river near the icehouse, where you must have fallen in."

I nodded as the memory cleared.

"Timmy . . ." Mother's voice sounded as if she had been crying, and as if she were frightened. She was staring at me, very hard, the way she could stare when she wanted me to tell her that I'd been a bad boy, the way she did before a spanking.

"You were a naughty boy, Timmy." Her eyes were wild, scary. "You ran away. You knew you never were allowed to go beyond the corner. You knew you were never; never supposed to go near the river."

I stared at her, open-mouthed. I looked around at the others. They all were watching my mother. I turned back to her. Something in her face frightened me, and I was

afraid to protest that I had not run away.

I was afraid to say more than, "Bobbyling. Where's Bobbyling?"

The front door opened and the old man we first had met at the icehouse door came into the room. In his hand, carefully held in a cloth, were the big ice tongs.

He said to the policeman, "Maybe you'd better have a look at the bloodstains—and the fingerprints on these."

So a song I had learned in college, a song to be sung absently in the shower, never had been linked in my mind with the tragedy of my childhood; not until this morning when the complete lyrics came unrelentingly back to me:

"Oh the iceman is a nice man  
But of just one thing I'm sure  
There's something in his business

That affects his temperature.  
Love is such a funny thing  
But I found out once or twice  
All you can get from the iceman  
Is ice, ice, ice!"



*Fat Jow say, It perhaps be better for police to leave matter of sentiment—and game of chance—to Chinese brother.*



ing fog sliding in through the Gate, but as yet it was too early for the rumble of traffic in the streets.

He stepped into his battered slippers and, drawing on his silken robe, shuffled through his small basement apartment to the door. "Who is there?" he called.

"Gim Wong," came the answer, in a voice he knew.

If he was surprised, he did not reveal it as he unbolted the door. Undoubtedly his old friend and fellow merchant had a pressing reason for the time of his visit, and in his own good time would inform Fat Jow without being asked.

**A** RAPID pounding at his street door aroused Fat Jow from the depths of sleep. He switched on the bedside lamp, sat rubbing his eyes while he gathered his senses. The muffled moan of foghorns about the Bay bespoke early-morn-

Gim Wong glanced up and down the steep hillside street before stepping inside. "I run from the police," he explained as he closed the door behind him. "They raided the pai gow game at the Hing family association, and they were coming after me. Your door was nearer than my own."

"You are most welcome," said Fat Jow. In their eyes gambling was not a crime, but a revered ancestral privilege hallowed by a thousand years, more to be honored than were the presumptuous laws designed by the white foreigners to forbid it. Its preservation against all attackers was a stimulating battle of wits, into which all Chinatown entered with zest and invention, an eternal contest against the recurrent attempts of the city to throttle the various games of chance.

However, pai gow was a game for the wealthy, and Gim Wong was not wealthy. His modest stature as owner of a ten-machine sewing shop permitted perhaps the lottery, but never pai gow. Of a single evening, thousands were won and lost at the pai gow table.

In a manner encouraging his guest to refuse his invitation—his hospitality was at low ebb at this hour—Fat Jow asked, "Will you have tea?"

"It is very late," said Gim Wong,

"and I have not slept. I ask only to rest here until daybreak."

Fat Jow waved toward the old leather sofa. "Sleep, then," he said, and returned to bed.

In the gray morning, when he emerged once more from his bedroom, Gim Wong was gone, fully as expected. Fat Jow put the incident from his mind. He took breakfast at his customary small restaurant at the nearby corner of Powell Street, removed sufficiently from Grant Avenue that the small swinging sign, lettered only in Chinese, did not draw the tourist seeking such barbarian dishes as chop suey. The decor was clean and utilitarian, the white tile and yellow paint almost monastic for lack of ornamentation.

Ordinarily the breakfast atmosphere was subdued and conducive to contemplation, but today a buzz of repressed excitement pervaded the crowded room. Men discussed the pai gow raid, and the serious injury to old Suey Tong, who now lay in police custody at St. Francis Hospital on the other side of the hill.

Suey Tong had attempted to flee by leaping from a window, and had fallen. A well-known importer of substance who could win or lose with equanimity, he was one to frequent the pai gow game. Not so Gim Wong. For Gim Wong to

sit at that table suggested that he was in trouble. Fat Jow went his way to his herb-shop with slow step.

Toward midday he was occupied at the rolltop desk in the loft at the rear of the shop when the jangling of bells on the door below announced a caller. He turned his swivel-chair and peered over the rail. He had seen this man before. Where? His conservative business suit identified him as neither customer nor casual tourist strayed from the sightseers' thoroughfare. This was a local foreigner from the confusing world of San Francisco enveloping his haven of order and reason called Chinatown.

A momentary chill touched Fat Jow's shoulders; was one of Lindner's friends on a mission of vengeance? This very shop had come to him from the hands of the grateful son of Moon Kai, for Fat Jow's part in finding the murderer of his father.

The stranger saw him and came to the foot of the loft stairs. "Remember me? Detective Lieutenant Cogswell. We met in court."

"Ah yes." Fat Jow relaxed, beckoned warmly. "Do come, sit down."

Cogswell took the ancient kitchen chair beside the desk, began to tilt back, was discouraged by an ominous creak. "We haven't forgot-

ten your help in cracking Lindner's protection racket. We need you again."

Fat Jow shrugged. "You have a staff of trained professionals, and you come to a struggling shop-keeper?"

"There are more doors open to you around here than to any man on the force."

"You do me an honor. I trust that I may justify it."

"I suppose you've heard of the pai gow raid?"

Fat Jow's manner cooled. "There is talk on the streets. I must advise you, sir, if the matter concerns gambling, then I cannot be of assistance to you."

"If it were gambling alone, I wouldn't have come. Suey Tong died a few minutes ago . . . without regaining consciousness."

Fat Jow clucked and shook his head. "But surely you do not suspect murder?"

"No, no. It was an accident. A man his age, jumping from a window, was just asking for it. Couldn't keep his feet, and fell against some cement steps."

"Then, if it is not gambling that brings you, and not murder . . . ?"

Cogswell leaned closer and lowered his voice confidentially. "Suey Tong was heavy winner," he said. "Nobody would tell us who sat in on the game and got away, but one

did say that Suey Tong had at least \$17,000 on him when he went through that window. He just scraped it off the table and jumped. By the time we got out of the building and into the alley, he had only \$2000 on him."

"Hardly a conventional robbery," mused Fat Jow. "Would not a thief have taken it all?" The finger of accusation pointed more strongly at Gim Wong. "It suggests a specific sum desired, and no more. You have made arrests?"

"Yes, two—they weren't fast enough to get out the window. They couldn't have taken it. The others got away clean. I don't know where they got to. In seconds, there was not a soul to be seen."

Fat Jow stood up, to signify that the interview was at an end. "I shall make inquiries. Come at the same time tomorrow, and we shall see what I have learned."

Reluctantly Cogswell prepared to leave. "Don't you want me to fill you in?"

Fat Jow permitted a small smile. "Your motives and mine merge only incidentally, and at a single point. I prefer to work without distraction of detail which appears important to you. You request my help, please let me offer it as I will. Good day, sir."

Long after Cogswell had gone,

Fat Jow sat in the swivel chair with eyes closed, hands clasped in his lap. The elements of the picture had begun to arrange themselves into a pattern.

At his usual midday closing time, he locked the shop and walked the few blocks to the sewing shop. The women were at their machines solemnly making denim work clothing, but Gim Wong, they said, had not appeared today. Fat Jow went next to the Hing family-association building, where the old woman who was the only resident at home during the working day conducted him to the game room in the apartment adjoining hers.

A large round table and several chairs were the only furniture, under a hanging single-bulb fixture with metal shade, white inside and green outside. Fat Jow stepped to the window. The alley was but a lane, barely broad enough for three persons walking abreast. It did not pierce the block, and its only entrance and exit was three doors above his own. Gim Wong had chosen well his steps.

The old woman was of little help. Although her window also faced the alley, and she had seen Suey Tong jump and fall, the police had at that moment summoned her to the door, and she had seen no more.

It was indeed time to talk to Gim Wong, but Fat Jow was unable to find him. He had not been at home since the preceding evening. Only one person had seen him this day other than Fat Jow, as he walked a street far removed from his daily habit. Fat Jow returned to the herb shop.

Near the day's close, when the congestion of the homebound city slackened and the strollers increased on Grant Avenue, Fat Jow made preparation for expected guests. Always they came, a few of his friends, seeking counsel or silent companionship. Today came Lee Keung of the noodle factory, Ng Har of the fowl market . . . and, as he had hoped, Gim Wong. They sat about the teakwood table which had come from China with Moon Kai in the old days, and chatted politely of inconsequential matters. Knowing Gim Wong's part in the pai gow game, they would not speak of it unless he did, and he did not.

Fat Jow requested that Gim Wong remain. After showing the others out and drawing the "closed" shade on the door, he returned to the loft to assume his professional position at the rolltop desk. He did not look at Gim Wong, who still sat at the teakwood table, toying absently with his empty cup. Fat Jow said, "You

rested in my house this morning."

Gim Wong moved restlessly to the loft rail and leaned his hands upon it. "You were more than kind."

"The police have come to me."

Fat Jow glanced aside to detect any reaction; Gim Wong did not stir, but the old polished-wood rail creaked. "I told them nothing, of course. But it seems that gambling is not the only subject under inquiry. I would know whom I shield—and from what I shield him. I will manufacture a deliberate lie for no one."

Gim Wong came to the kitchen chair, sat upon its edge. His eyes pled. "You will not expose me?"

"You must trust me," said Fat Jow. "There may be a way to assist the police without falsehood." He turned his swivel chair away slightly. "Perhaps I know more than you think. You were in dire need of much money before you entered the game. Otherwise you would not have gone." Gim Wong remained silent. "You have, I believe," continued Fat Jow, tapping his fingers upon the desk, "a daughter and small grandchild still in Red China . . ."

Gim Wong hid his face. "Two grandchildren—whom I have never seen."

"And the Reds have required several thousand dollars to see

them both safely to Hong Kong."

Gim Wong regarded him with wonder. "The figure was \$20,000," he whispered.

"Yet Suey Tong had another \$2000 which was not touched."

"I had \$3000 in the bank; I needed only \$17,000."

"It was wrong to take it from a dying man."

"Yes," said Gim Wong, lowering his eyes.

"Why did you not come to your friends? We are qualified to furnish more than tea and idle talk. Are you so proud that you believe we do not know you cannot assemble a sum like this of your own assets?"

"I had heard of the great winnings at pai gow. If one fortunate evening would be enough, why trouble my friends? I waited until I felt a day when fortune came upon me."

"Your evening was otherwise, I gather."

Gim Wong sagged visibly, sat back in the chair. "It began so. I won, as I had known I would. Hand after hand I won. I passed \$16,000, \$16,500, and intended to stop after winning the last \$500 on the next hand. Then Suey Tong came in, and it was he who won the next hand—and the next. I saw all the money that had been in my hands flow across the table to him,

and the \$500 as well. I was about to leave, for I could not lose the stakes I had brought to the game. But the police came. Suey Tong was wise and practiced; he gathered into one hand the money before him, and jumped from the window while still the rest of us were pushing back from the table. One went after him at once, and was gone into the night. I followed closely, but delayed to help Suey Tong where he fell. I soon saw that he lay as one dead, and the money scattered about. I was picking it up when a voice shouted from the window. I ran, because it seemed the only thing to do. I did not remember the money in my hand until I had come near your door, and I put it out of sight."

Fat Jow sighed. "If only you had come to me before the game! I presume that you have cabled the money to your contact in Hong Kong?"

Gim Wong hesitated, then reached into his jacket and handed Fat Jow a packet of banknotes bound with an elastic band. "I walked the street all day," he said slowly, "summoning the courage to go to the telegraph office. But I could not. It is all there. Please. Give it to the police."

A smile crept across Fat Jow's face. "That is not exactly what I

have in mind," he said, cradling the money in his hands as if it were worth many times its value. "With your permission, I shall place it in my safe overnight, to gather interest on the . . . loan."

Gim Wong stiffened, raised his head. "I refuse to lose face by accepting charity from my friends," he said.

Fat Jow reached to the back of the desk and pulled the telephone directory to him. "Perhaps we may satisfy the police and save your face at the same time. Leave me now, and come to me again tomorrow afternoon. We shall then talk of your family."

He settled busily to work, and paid no heed as Gim Wong wearily descended from the loft and let himself out.

Starting within a quarter-hour of the opening of the Chinatown office of the Bank of America the next morning, a procession of respected citizens came and went through the door of the herb shop. The bells were hardly silent throughout most of the morning. One after another the men went up the loft stairs to transact an average of five minutes' business with the herbalist at his rolltop desk. After the last had gone, Fat Jow employed his abacus to make order of the litter of paper before him.

Thus Cogswell found him. Without pausing in his task, Fat Jow waved him to the kitchen chair. Cogswell knew better than to hurry him; he sat meekly, entranced with the concentration and expert fingers of the old man.

At length Fat Jow pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and rubbed his eyes. "It is done," he said.

"Have you learned anything?" asked Cogswell bluntly.

"A bit here, a bit there."

"Did you find out who got away?"

Fat Jow spread his hands. "They were innocent gamblers, my good sir, not robbers. My inquiry, as you recall, had to do only with a suspected robbery. I am pleased to report that there was no robbery."

Cogswell sniffed. "I'd like to know what you call it. Several thousand dollars disappeared between that room and the alley."

"It was in the nature of a loan, sir." Fat Jow pushed toward him a long list of signatures. "Please read the statement that these gentlemen have signed."

Cogswell read aloud, with growing suspicion: "We the undersigned voters and taxpayers of the city of San Francisco have borrowed of the late Suey Tong, grievously fallen at the Hing family association upon the 21st in-



stant, the following sums . . ." He looked up sharply at Fat Jow. "Wait now! Are you trying to tell me all these guys got to him in the alley and . . . borrowed the money?"

Fat Jow raised one finger. "Ah no. If the language creates such an image, it is unfortunate. A man like Suey Tong gathers in his wake many debtors, great and small."

Cogswell shook the list at him. "I can't put this in my report! Who took the money?"

"You have the names there, sir." Fat Jow now handed him a thick unsealed envelope. "And here is the money, which they have paid back."

Sourly Cogswell removed from the envelope a collection of personal checks. "Pay to the order of the Estate of Suey Tong, \$250.00. Pay to the order of the Estate of Suey Tong, \$1,400.00."

"You will find the list to be accurate," said Fat Jow. "The total is \$18,384.00. The excess represents interest on the loan, you see."

"The whole bunch is standing up for somebody, and I want to know who!" Cogswell was struggling to maintain professional calm.

"Why?" Fat Jow's face was unsmiling, but a chuckle lurked in his voice. "There is no crime—that I can recognize. First, some money

was missing, and now it is not missing any more. Therefore, my interest in the case is at an end." He stood up. "You are pursuing only gamblers . . . and since we are all gamblers here, all I may say is, good hunting, sir."

Cogswell's frustration melted into a grin of wry admiration. "I'm glad you're on our side," he said, extending his hand, "if only part of the time. May I treat you to lunch?"

Fat Jow beamed. "Ordinarily, it would be my pleasure. But I do not think it wise that I be seen fraternizing with the police. Some of these valuable doors may begin being closed even to me."

Only when Cogswell was safely out of sight did Fat Jow take from his safe the money he stored for Gim Wong. Rather than wait for Gim Wong, he would go now to the sewing shop, learn the name of the Hong Kong contact, and cable the money himself, so that it could not be traced to Gim Wong. His conscience was clear, and suddenly Gim Wong had a right to the money he had won, had then lost to Suey Tong, and later had gathered from the pavement of the alley.

The police were less than satisfied, but one could not do them the disservice of thrusting upon them the burden of understanding a matter of sentiment.

*With a brilliant rainbow in the offing, does one pause to ponder its origin?*



## JOINT TENANCY

It was a cold overcast day and the rain began falling when we gathered by the open grave. The few of us huddled under umbrellas. The preacher completed the funeral service by saying, "Any day a person meets his maker is a good

day." Still, there was a noticeable lack of tears.

The deceased was my Aunt Nell, whom I had met only twice in my life. I suppose I attended her funeral because she was my last living relative. Her husband, my uncle by marriage, admits no relation to any family ties. In fact, he was abrupt to the point of being rude the time I attempted a visit several years ago.

I looked at my uncle's face. He stood, muttering to himself, his large jaw working defiantly. He is a big man of unusual build: bull shouldered, with a huge head, rawboned and hefty, though not all of his weight is fat. He is six feet tall and probably as strong as an ox, though no one can say because he is so lazy. Far as I know, his only exercise is toting his weight around.

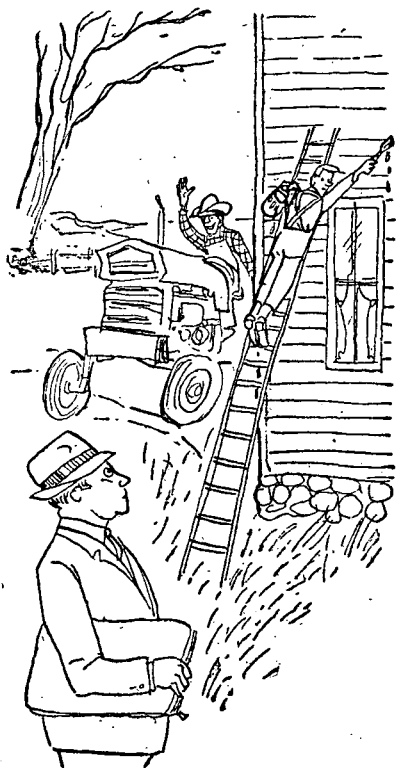
by Robert W.  
Alexander

Uncle George seemed to need no consolation from me, so when the service was finished I walked for my car in slow step with the others. I was halfway there when his voice boomed in my ear.

"You're Nell's nephew, ain't-cha?" he asked.

I acknowledged that I was, and he fell into step beside me, muttering and complaining about the costs of the funeral. He itemized the costs for me.

"Everything is high," I offered.



"The sickening part, there was no insurance on 'er. Not even a dime!" he groaned. When he saw the censuring look on my face, he added, "Now, don't accuse me of no feelin's. Nell was fifty and wore out. I told 'er booze would get 'er. Kept me broke truckin' wine to 'er."

I had understood it was my Aunt Nell's farm, and I asked him, "Wasn't it her farm?"

"It was *ours*! I wouldn't stay around and work no farm else'n it was mine. She put it in joint tendency. It's mine now."

"Yes, I'm sure it is, Uncle George."

He smiled shrewdly. "Now don't butter me up with that 'Uncle George' bit. You was her relative, not mine." He walked a few more steps, shaking his head, then said, "Damn! No insurance."

From the corner of my eye I saw him puzzling me. When we had reached my car, he asked, "What you doing these days?"

"Working in a gas station," I admitted.

"What!" he protested. "Nell said you were all-fire smart. Bookkeeper or somethin'."

"I studied accounting, but it was too much eyestrain. I had to switch to outdoor work." It was the truth. My existence was meager and boring. I lived in a rooming

house, prompted by economics.

He asked me for a ride out to his farm, about fourteen miles out of Mayberry. It wasn't too far out of my way, so I agreed. "Sure, get in."

He was cheerful on the way to his farm. He had saved ten dollars the limousine would have charged. Only the lack of insurance on his wife seemed to gall him.

"Course, I never thought she'd die first," he philosophized. "Otherwise, I would'a bought some." Suddenly he laughed. "Heh, heh! She wanted me to take some out. Ha! I wouldn't'a slept nights. Nell was a hellion!"

I reserved comment. I wasn't aware my aunt had a temper. We rode in silence. It annoyed me to know he was studying me. When I glanced at him now and then, he didn't so much as blink his dark brown eyes.

"How much you make in the gas station?" he asked.

"Not much. Why?"

"Oh, I was thinkin'. Young fellow like you . . . Smart, Nell said."

"Not so smart," I shook my head. "I worked myself through an education I can't use."

His large hand rubbed his chin thoughtfully. As though it were a spontaneous thought, he said, "Tell you what, Donald. Why don't you move in with me?"

I'm sure there was genuine surprise on my face.

"Sure," he said. "I know I was never one for relatives. But a man changes. I don't hanker to live here alone, an' I ain't gonna marry again. Tell you, boy, I been shot down four times thataway. See, I was thinkin', come spring, you and me could plant a crop and make out right fine. Divvy up and all. Don't cost nothin' t'live on a farm."

I thought about it, shutting the wipers off as the rain stopped. I wouldn't mind taking a vacation on a farm for a time, but I wasn't sure I could get along with him, and I said as much. He laughed.

"We'd hit it off. I'm not all that ornery. I'm a plain-speakin' man. I says what I think, and you can say, too. I don't like people who does smilin' when they think frownin'."

"Hypocrites."

"That's them. Now, you're a smart boy, Donald. This here farm is worth a bit, brought up to snuff, an' I ain't got no other livin' soul to leave it to when I kick off. That ain't gonna be for a time, but you ain't goin' no place anyhow. I'm right, now ain't I?"

I sighed. "You're right."

"Yeah, so you just bundle in, help with the chores and bide around here. T'ain't so bad.

There's some good-lookin' fillies about these parts."

"I'm sure—"

"Yes, sir, Donald. You and me has got to stick together. Yer my only nephew. Yep, it took a spell, but now I see a man needs his own around him."

I am not as smart, or astute, as my Aunt Nell may have proclaimed. The obvious has to be in plain view for me to believe it, so Uncle George's motivation for inviting me to live with him, which I began doing, was obscure. However, I had a hunch there was a special reason he wanted me with him. After the first week I decided the old goat merely wanted a free cook and dishwasher. The culinary chores were up to me; with advice from him, of course. He had certain ways he liked his food prepared. His whiskey was easy to serve. He drank it straight, and he could down a quart an evening without the slightest jiggle to his equilibrium.

Saturday night I attended the civic dance in Mayberry, met a girl and took her home. Uncle George heartily approved, but was wild with curiosity. The girl was Sue Stocker, a blonde young lady, and she lived near us.

"Gentlemen don't tell," I said, giving Uncle George a wink. That was all the vicarious thrill I'd con-

tribute. Hadn't he been young once?

"Don't they now?" he said, rocking forward to bang his beer on the table. "Times has changed. Why, we used to gather round and brag and lie . . . Anyhow, t'aint so bad here."

"Just fine, Uncle George."

"Get the tractor running?"

"Yes. There was nothing wrong with it, except the battery was dead. And it was out of gas."

"Yeah, it wouldn't start. Didn't get to plow last year. You can, though."

"Uncle George, about putting in this crop, *together*? By the time I care for the chickens, mend fences, and do the cooking, washing and cleaning, the day is used up."

"You'll speed up, Donald. Yer Aunty Nell handled it all, with time left to waggle her jaw. Now see, I really don't haff to work. I got income—land leases, and two-thirds the land is farmed by sharecroppers. The rest is wasted, so I'm lettin' you have it."

"Thank you—"

"Why, shore. Plantin' time's a-comin'. Don't forget, it's all gonna be yours someday. Say, I brung some paint from town. Soon as the fences along the road is mended, splash some paint on the house."

"All right," I agreed. The house really needed the paint. I don't think he cared what it looked like,

but he wanted to impress Ralph Collins, the banker who holds the mortgage on the farm. When Mr. Collins came out, I learned the farm was mortgaged to the hilt.

Uncle George saw his car coming, and ran out the back door and started the tractor. I was painting the side of the house when the banker drove in. Uncle George climbed from the tractor like he had been working all morning.

"This is my nephew, Donald," he said.

I waved my paint brush in return to Mr. Collins' nod. His gray eyes studied me dubiously as Uncle George speculated how his weed-covered acres were to be turned into paying crops—with my help. Uncle George further pointed out how *we* were fixing up the place.

The banker locked eyes with me. "You *are* staying on?"

"Yes. I'm living with Uncle George."

Mr. Collins sighed. "Must be as he said." He nodded to me. "This farm is capable of producing a good income, if worked. Do you know anything about farming?"

"Does he?" Uncle George boomed. "Why, Donald practically ran his pa's farm down in Creoot. Pride of the valley, they say. Donald had schoolin' on farmin'."

Mr. Collins was impressed. "Oh?

Agriculture college?" he asked.

I started to shake my head, but Uncle George was semaphoring with his arms. "I finished school," I shrugged.

"Well, I'll give you the chance," he said. "I'll extend the mortgage." He turned to my beaming uncle. "The money from the Hopkins lease will pay the interest, and I'll let you have the money from the Myers' crop to tide you over until you harvest your own crop."

"Mighty kind of you, banker."

"Yes. But you still must make prompt payments on the loan I made you for the funeral."

"That I will, rest-a-sure. Dang shame about no insurance. Why, if we'd'a knowed, we'd'a had a policy big enough to pay all debts. I'll be thinkin' mighty sorry about that every time I make a grave payment."

"I warned you about insurance, Mr. Lokie."

"That you did, Mr. Collins. That you sure did, and I'm not a man who won't learn from mistakes. I'm gonna buy insurance. Yes, sir! My nephew needs takin' care of. Somethin' happen to me, I don't want him stuck with a debted farm."

The banker nodded to me and then left. I climbed from the ladder and chided Uncle George for lying about my schooling.

"You've lots to learn, boy," he said. "Man can get more out of life with his mouth than he can his back. But I'm tellin' a truth, Donald. I'm gonna buy insurance; a nice big policy, enough to clear the mortgage and be a gentleman farmer. An' there's no sense leasing the land after this year. Why, they take the lion's share."

"You're getting wise, Uncle George."

"Deed I am, Donald. Deed I am."

The insurance salesman, Stanley Eccles, came out a few days later. He was a good salesman and knew his business, but after he explained a couple of policies, Uncle George stopped him.

"Mr. Eccles, I don't understand all that. No use lying to you. Now, I'll tell you what I want, and you tell me what it costs. Save lots of time."

Mr. Eccles was agreeable.

Uncle George winked at me and took a deep swallow from his bottle. "Now," he wheezed, "I don't need no fringe and extrees. What I want is a policy that'll pay my poor nephew off when I die, about twenty-five thousand, for a round number. An' I want double-identity, case it's an accident."

"Yes, sir." Stanley Eccles quickly adjusted his glasses and checked his charts. He quoted a figure.

"It's high because of your age, fifty-one, and of course, you'll have to pass a medical examination."

"No trouble there," my uncle said, rubbing his chin. "Well, never was somethin' fer nothin'. Man's gotta pay fer what he wants." He looked at me. "We'll take it out of the Myers' money. Have to tighten our belts a mite till our crop's sold. How much more would it be to put a policy on my nephew, Donald, here?"

"How old are you?" the insurance man asked me.

I straightened in my chair. "I don't want insurance."

"Sure you do, boy. Suppose somethin' happened to you! Me yer only relative, with funeral expenses again. You don't want me t' suffer that—after all I'm doing for you?"

"I can't afford it."

"I'm payin' it. Just a small policy to cover funeral expenses. It's only fair."

I didn't see any harm in a small policy if it made him happy. "I'm twenty-five," I told the salesman.

"Premium is quite a bit less for a man your age," Mr. Eccles said, and quoted a figure.

My uncle's eyes lighted. "Is that a fact?" he said, and looked at me as though his mouth was filled with cherry pie. "Well, now," he warbled, "man's a fool not to take

advantage of a bargain. Does that include double-identity?"

"Double indemnity, yes."

"Well, then, we ain't gonna quibble about no small policy. You just go ahead and write him up twenty-five thousand dollars, too. Nothin' chintzy about us."

The policies went into effect after we passed our physical examinations on Friday. I wasn't too sure what to think about it. There was no doubt that Uncle George was a clever man. Most lazy people are to some degree, or they couldn't get away with being lazy. I was his beneficiary, and he was mine. I thought it humorous that he'd bet the premium money that I would die before he did. He wasn't going to be caught short again.

Saturday night I mentioned it to Sue Stocker. We had been to a dance, and we were parked out by her father's barn, talking -and things. I didn't tell her too much about myself the first time I took her home.

"You'd better watch him," she said.

"Oh, come off it, Sue. He's made out a holographic will, leaving the farm to me. I've got it. If it wasn't for the life insurance, he wouldn't be leaving me anything. It's mortgaged to the limit."

"Don, there isn't much that goes on in a small town that isn't com-

mon knowledge. Let me fill you in," she said, leaning forward from my arm around her shoulders. "Your uncle *tried* to buy life insurance on your aunt."

"What?"

"That's right," she nodded.

"You sure about that?"

"Positive! Mildred, my girlfriend, is the doctor's assistant. Didn't Doctor Kielman give you your physicals?"

"Yeah."

"Well, he gave your aunt one, too."

I frowned. "Come on, Sue. Get to the point."

"Well, the point is," she said impatiently, "your aunt must not have told your uncle she didn't pass the physical."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because she's dead!"

"Now hold on! My aunt stumbled in the chicken yard." I shrugged. "It's rumored she had been drinking. She hit her head on the water pipe—"

"Did she?"

"Well . . . Didn't she?"

Sue leaned back in the seat beside me and propped her knees against the dashboard. "A moot question, impossible to prove. There is only your uncle's testimony. The thing is, your uncle thought the policy was being mailed to him—and he didn't wait three days. At



least your aunt only lived three days."

"They'd been married twelve years," I protested.

"Drinking up Nell's farm. They were at the end of their rope. The bank was going to foreclose the mortgage."

"How do you know?"

Sue rolled her blue eyes with patience. One thing about her, she has personality as well as a pretty face. "Everybody knew, Don. Grace works in the bank and . . . You know how gossip gets around. For example, we're paired now that you've dated me two Saturdays in a row."

I pretended to be shocked. "A bachelor's in jeopardy from only two dates? And one of them impromptu?"

"Tongues always wag."

"They saw the light in my eye."

She smiled. "Or maybe in mine. Anyway, seriously, Don, your life might be in danger. Father thinks so, too."

I wanted to know what her father knew about me. She laughed, admitting her father was more particular about the men she dated than she was. "He says your Uncle George is a scoundrel, whether he murdered your aunt or not, and that the old devil must have a scheme to invite you to live with him. There was never any charity

in him, so keep your eyes open."

"Charity? Listen, you tell your father I'm hoeing *two* rows, over there." She laughed and we changed the subject.

Needless to say, the next morning as I ate breakfast with Uncle George I viewed him with new eyes. He had worn his long, flannel nightshirt to the table, and sat scratching his bountiful stomach as he finished his coffee. He caught me staring. Immediately, he was alert.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing," I temporized. I lit a cigarette and decided to ask him straight out. "Why didn't you tell me that Aunt Nell attempted to take out life insurance?"

"Now who's been tellin' stories, boy? Why, there ain't nothin' to that. Shoot, I didn't know a thing 'bout it, till after. Nell, she sneaked off to get some when I was again' it. Come as a complete surprise t' me."

"Oh," I said.

"That's the truth, boy, but I see where the doubtin' would grow." His eyes watched me as he drained his cup, then set it on the table. After wiping the back of his arm across his mouth, he nodded.

With pretended nonchalance, I'd been trying to convey that I believed him. Evidently, I wasn't fooling him.

"'Pears t' me," he said, "time to put things in the open. Kinsfolk shouldn't have no doubts 'bout each other. 'Sides, I wouldn't want you gettin' ideas, neither. See, Donald, I know you're a smart boy, so I'm gonna tell you the plan."

"I'm all ears."

His unshaven face widened into a grin. "I figured ya might be. You didn't fidget none when I put a big policy on me, but ya turned kinda sheet color when I put one on you. Ha! I knew what you was thinkin'. But, Donald boy, there's no reason to try and push each other off the deep end. We'll work a little deal together."

"How?" I couldn't figure what he had in mind, if one of us had to die for the other to collect.

His scheme was a waiting one. It seems that every so often the body of some unfortunate tramp was found along the railroad tracks which cut through the farm down at the south end.

"Ever now or so, one's found," he said. "Twice a year or more, it happens. Train slows for Mayberry at the bend. They see the creek an' woods, an' hop off—only, they don't see the stones in the weeds. They tumble off and bash their head on a rock, or maybe 'nother hobo does it for 'em. They got a jungle gatherin' under the trees by the crick."

"So how does that collect insurance?"

"Well, now . . ." He winked with deliberation. "We get us a body, we can say it's you."

I shook my head. "Won't work, Uncle George. There's fingerprints and everything else to identify a corpse."

"Shore, but we'll doctor it up a little."

"Where will I go?"

"Why," he said, "you'll be settin' on a sunny beach in Californee, waitin' for yer split of insurance."

"You'll send me half?"

"Course I will, boy. Don't fret none there. I couldn't have you comin' back here mad." He wagged his finger. "See, by having it 'pear a accident, we'll split fifty thousand from the double-identity."

I pretended to think it over. If I refused to go along he would send me packing, and that would mean leaving Sue Stocker. The thought of breaking off with her was enough to consider his fraudulent plan. There was great risk, but there was also a fortune—if we were successful. I debated if dollars could buy whatever integrity I had. I would never be able to earn that kind of money for a wife.

"Yer kinda sweet on the Stocker gal, ain'tcha?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Don'tcha worry none about that! A man with twenty-five thousand is all the more attractive. You talk 'er into marryin' up and runnin' off with ya to Californnee. Wife don't testify again' a husband."

I wondered if part of his original scheme was to have me fall for a local girl. If so, it had worked. There was no doubt in my mind that I was in love with Sue. I stalled my uncle by saying, "We'll see what develops."

That pleased him, and he assumed that I agreed to cooperate. He leaned back in his chair and patted his stomach with both hands.

"Sort of figured ya would, Donald. Yer a smart boy."

I had no intention, at least at that time, to have any part of his scheme, but led him on so he wouldn't send me away. I hoped there would be time to raise a crop and sell it. I wanted to add the stake to my small savings. Sue and I could leave Mayberry and start someplace else. Sue is a very practical girl. I started seeing her nearly every night, and we talked about our future. I said when we married, I wanted to leave Mayberry. She was agreeable.

"That suits me. You can tell your uncle to keep his farm. I don't trust him. In fact, I worry about you living with him with that

life insurance on you. He's foxy."

I told her to forget it. "I'm watching him. He's a sly one, but the funny thing is, the last few days, he's watching me, too."

It was the truth. Uncle George was taking no chances on me double-crossing him. He kept an eye on the food I prepared, and he was careful not to get close when I was swinging a pick for a post hole. I tended him the same respect. If either of us got up at night to use the bathroom, the other listened until he heard the bedsprings creak a return to the covers. I set booby traps near the bedroom door in case he had ideas of sneaking in at night. I'm sure he did too; though I never saw evidence. By the time it was right to start the plowing, I was satisfied it wasn't his intention to risk any murder. It seemed logical. His scheme to defraud the insurance company with my help was safer.

The morning I was to plow the field, he had to hook up the farrow-discs, because I know nothing of farming. I had sharpened the discs to razor sharpness, and I stood watching as he backed the tractor up to the plow.

"Now, put that pin in there," he instructed. He referred to the hitch. "Then come 'round. I'll show ya how t' make 'er work."

Both the big wheeled tractor and

the plow with its rows of discs were against the barn, and I had to climb over the hitch to fit the connecting pin in from the barn side. He couldn't hear me because he had the tractor's engine revved up unnecessarily high, so I squeezed between the barn and the big rear wheel of the tractor to pat him on his broad back. Just as I did, the tractor leaped ahead, and the wheel threw me forward. To avoid being crushed, I dived under the tractor. I've never moved so fast in my life. The wheel just missed my legs. My dislodged hat was ground into the earth.

I expected Uncle George to stop the tractor abruptly, but he didn't! The tractor kept going! I hugged the ground until the tractor cleared me, then I sat up, bracing myself on one arm. I could see him waving his arms as though he were wrestling the controls, but the tractor went a hundred feet before he stopped it. I stood up and brushed the dirt off as he rushed back. His eyes were round and his mouth open.

"Yer all right!" he wheezed.

"Yeah! The pin wouldn't fit in the hitch!"

He took his eyes from me to look at the disc-blades of the plow. "Lord save us!" he exclaimed. "That was lucky! Why, I thought you'd be in six or seven pieces!"

He stopped to speculate on my expression. "Oh, I know what yer thinkin', but t'ain't so. My foot slipped off the clutch. Got so excited the blasted thing got away from me. Now, that's the truth, boy."

"Yeah!" I said sarcastically.

He shook his head sorrowfully. "Oh, this is turrible. Looks so bad fer me. My goodness, an' you an' me got such good plans." He gripped my shoulder with a huge hand. I'm nearly six foot and weigh a hundred and sixty, but he outweighs me by eighty pounds. "Boy, ya gotta reason it out," he pleaded, "cause it weren't on purpose. Why, it would look bad fer me. Nell dying accidental, then you gettin' it a couple months after I buys the insurance . . . Shore, now, you see I wouldn't take a chance like that!"

I told him I believed him to shut him up or he would spend the whole morning pleading his innocence—and it might have been an accident. He knows little about machinery, even his car. One ride into town with him was enough. He drives as though he thinks the car is going to see obstacles before he does.

I didn't mention any near-demise to Sue that night. The way I feel about her, I'd do anything she wanted. If I told her, she'd tell me

to leave Uncle George. Then I wouldn't share in any crop money to set an early date for our marriage, and her father was already hinting financial stability was the prime requisite before talking of marriage.

By the middle of the third day of plowing I finally had the tractor down by the railroad tracks, and I saw my uncle bound from the trees on the other side of the tracks. He goes down there frequently to catfish in the big pond that is fed by the creek. The bushes are thick under the trees, but he has a path through the growth. He waved to me.

"Come on!" he called.

I drove the tractor to where he was standing up on the tracks, shut the engine off, and slid off the seat. He walked over to the shade of the trees and beckoned to me again.

When I reached him, he said, "Boy, we got us a body." He said it guardedly, as though someone might overhear.

"What? Where?" I never really expected this to happen.

He crooked his finger and I followed him down the path, dodging the whip-back of the branches he pulled aside. The clearing next to the pond was about a hundred yards from the railroad. A man in tattered clothes, brown pants and a

black coat, was sprawled face down. He was lying next to a circle of rocks charred from innumerable camp fires.

"Somebody kilt him," my uncle said.



The man was obviously dead. I was stunned. I knelt down beside the body with a racing heart, but I had the presence of mind not to touch him. Uncle George's plan for the insurance money could actually be tried!

"Opportunity's knockin'," Uncle George hissed. "Supposin' we puts yer clothes on 'im, then drag 'im out an' plow 'im up a little. Liken you fell off the tractor?"

Sanity returned to me; at least, reasons why we couldn't attempt

the fraud. I shook my head. "Wouldn't work, Uncle George."

"Shore it would. He's 'bout yer size."

"They'd know he wasn't me!"

"They couldn't tell. Grind 'im up good. His hair color is close t' yours."

"He's old!" I defended. "About sixty. He has gray hair mixed in with the brown. And they could determine his age, no matter how you mutilated him—"

Uncle George frowned. He looked from me to the body and sighed. "Even ground up, they can tell age?" He thoughtfully pulled on his chin. "Hmmm," he said in disappointment. "Wish you'd telled me that. Poor fellow. Well . . . Guess we'll have t' pass."

I looked at the body again. The back of the head had been crushed. In fact, the rock that did it was beside him. There was blood on it. I'm no expert, but it appeared the man hadn't been dead too long.

"He was recently killed," I gasped.

"Yeah, looked that way to me. Perfect chance fer us but fer his dang age. By golly, ain't that a shame?"

"Yes," I said, without realizing I was agreeing. I was looking at Uncle George's fishing poles. They were both set on forked branches and the lines were out in the wa-

ter. I turned to him. "You mean you came here and started fishing before you discovered the body?"

Uncle George solemnly nodded. "That's exactly how it was. I was fishin', and I looked around—an' there he was! Gimme quite a start."

I backed up a step. When I had entered the clearing, I couldn't help but see the body. It was lying where only a blind man wouldn't notice it. "We'd better call the sheriff," I said.

"Yeah, that's the thing t' do," he said. "First, though, we'd better drag 'im up by the tracks."

"Why? We don't want to touch him!"

"Well," he drawled, "I don't fancy takin' hold of dead people, but if we don't, they's gonna know the poor fellow was done in by somebody."

"It's obvious!"

"Why, shore. But I always drag 'em up by the tracks. Train goin' by ever hour or so. They always think the poor fellows jumped and hit a stone. Tell you what! I'll hoist 'im over to the tracks. You fetch that rock with the blood."

"No!" I backed up another step. "That would be covering up a murder, Uncle George." When his expression changed to a peculiar disapproval, I couldn't deny the painful clarity longer. I hurled the

accusation, "You killed this man, Uncle George!"

"Now, why you say that, boy?"

"Because there's no other reason to pull him to the tracks." I pointed to the man's open knapsack. "You went through his belongings, robbed him of what little he had!"

"Naw!" He shook his big head painfully. "Who done 'im, got it."

He suddenly clenched his beefy hands and placed them on his hips, blocking the path through the heavy bushes.

"Listen, Donald. Yer a smart boy, but yer a little mixed up. Supposin', which ain't so, but supposin' I did bash the poor fellow? Now, I'd a been doin' such fer you and me, huh? Gettin' us a body? T'ain't like I was troublin' you fer the risk."

"You murdered him, George! When he jumped off that last train you welcomed him like you were another bum—then bashed his head in!" We locked eyes. I could see crinkles of hate form on his face. "Chances are, you murdered my Aunt Nell, and God knows how many of these hobos. Is that where you got your whiskey money?"

He pretended to be deeply hurt. "Now don't talk thata-way, boy," he pleaded. He started for me as though to place a friendly arm around my shoulders and convince

me I was wrong and in no danger.

I watched him come. My back was to the pond. Even though I was half his age, I'd be no match against him if he got his gorilla-like arms around me, and he had me cut off from the path.

"Me and you is kinsfolk," he argued, watching my eyes. "No never mind what you think, we got us a good plan. We're gonna be rich—" Then he rushed me.

I was amazed how fast he could move. He was like a cat; slow and easy, until he was ready to spring. He was nearly on me with his first leap, diving at me with outstretched arms. If I moved to either side, he could still grab me with a hand. I did the only thing I could. I went over backward. My feet caught him in the stomach as he grabbed for me. I kicked with every bit of my strength. My feet vaulted him over my head.

I heard the air whoosh out of him as he sailed out into the pond. I heard the water splash. I didn't turn to look. I scrambled to my feet and headed for the path. I knew he couldn't catch me.

Strangely, my racing thoughts were all of regret as I dashed for safety. There would be no share of crop money and I would never inherit a farm. Then an ominous thought gripped me. He would lie! He would say the plot was mine;

that I killed the tramp, and tried to kill him, too, when he wouldn't agree!

My churning legs slowed. I thought I was far enough ahead not to worry, but I was wrong. As fast as I was, he was out of the pond. He threw a large, baseball-size rock, and it caught me behind my knee. My leg folded, and I fell hard. I couldn't get up. I rolled to my back, desperately feeling for some weapon to defend myself. He was running toward me with a boulder the size of a cantaloupe in his right hand. My hand found the rock he had thrown.

I watched him come at me, but remained motionless until he hurled the boulder. I dodged my head fast and it grazed my ear. Then I clouted him on the temple with my rock.

As he fell, I twisted away, bringing the rock up to hit him again. I didn't have to. He wasn't moving. I had knocked him out. My hands were shaking and my breath was coming in short pants.

My leg is throbbing with pain and I'm not sure it isn't broken. He's lying there face down. Now, I've really got a problem. If I kill him, I could make it look as though he and the tramp had a fight, and killed each other with the rocks. Or, maybe better, I could make it appear that the

tramp killed him—put my uncle's watch and things in his pocket—then drag the tramp up to the railroad and make it look like he was killed trying to catch a train for his getaway.

It seems only sensible to try for the insurance and the farm . . . but everything still hinges on Uncle George being dead. If he lives, it's going to be his word against mine. I finally found strength to crawl over to him and roll him over.

I don't know why it comes as a shock, but I don't have to worry about killing him. It's obvious I've already done that.

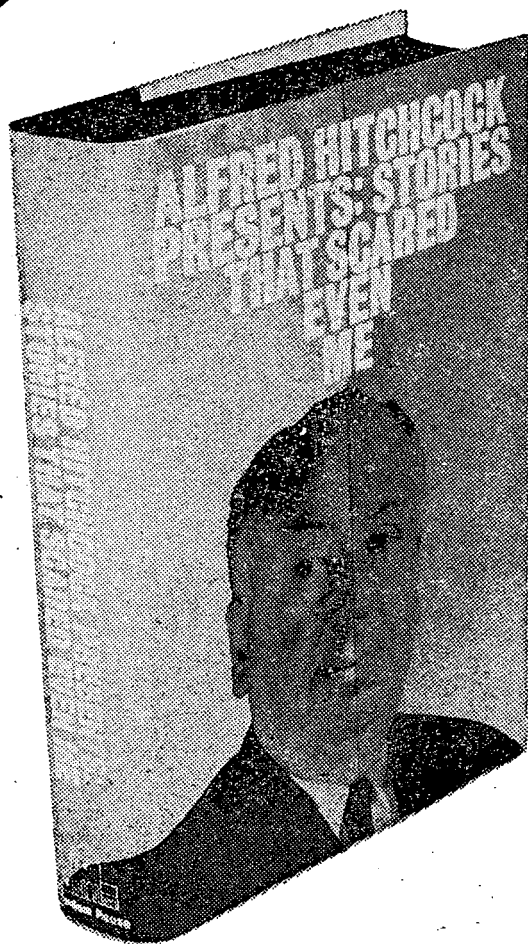
I lit a cigarette. I have to think this out. My leg is not broken. I can limp in and get the sheriff and explain exactly what happened. Or can I? Admitting I killed my uncle by proclaiming I was defending myself, could still raise undeserved suspicion. An unfriendly district attorney could twist it around that I killed him for the insurance—that I wanted the farm so I could marry Sue. Several people could testify that Sue had said she wouldn't go to live at the farm with my uncle there.

How does a man get into such a spot? I wonder if I should risk asking Sue's advice. No! Better not risk losing her! She might even think . . . No, I'd better have another cigarette and think this out.



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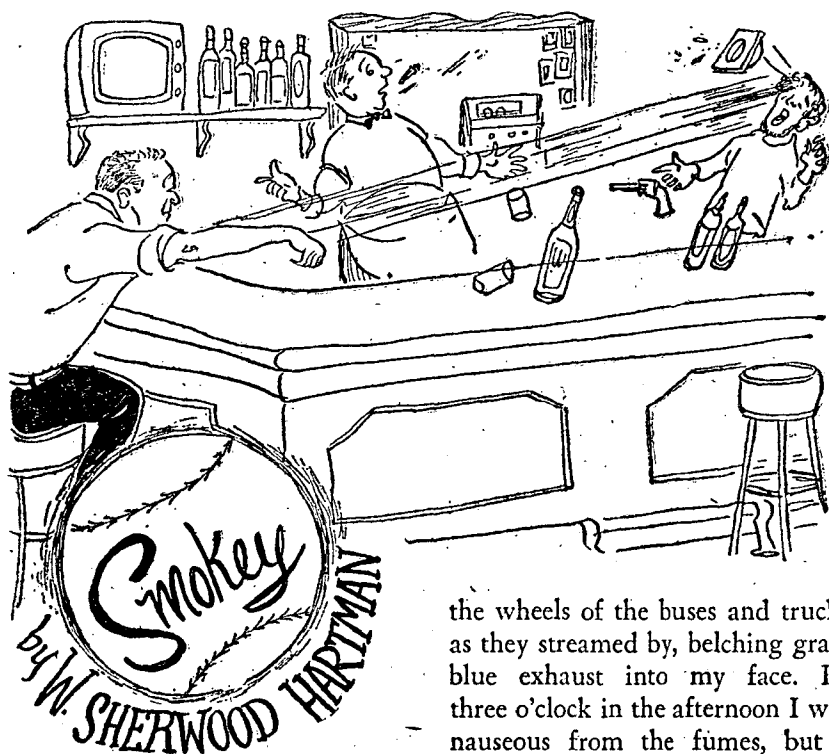
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*Germane to the viewer's angle, but one degree may determine "hero" or "scoundrel."*



**I**T WAS the first day of my transfer to the north side of the city and I'd taken off to try to find a place to live. The July heat simmered in jellied waves over the sidewalks and the tar puckered in little pimples on the street, popping under

the wheels of the buses and trucks as they streamed by, belching gray-blue exhaust into my face. By three o'clock in the afternoon I was nauseous from the fumes, but I had found an apartment that I figured my wife would like. Mamie wasn't too keen about moving out of the old neighborhood, and neither was I, but it was made pretty clear that my promotion hinged on taking on this new area and I had waited too long for the chance

SMOKEY

101

to pass it up. At my age, there wouldn't be any more chances, and the raise would mean a lot when I retired in two years. Then Mamie and me could move to the place in the country we've been saving for.

At the moment, it was the heat that was bothering me. I used to be able to take it when I was younger, but this day had taken the starch out of me. I paid the deposit on the apartment and left the building to look for the nearest bar.

Pete's Cozy Corner was at the end of the block and I went in. It was a typical neighborhood place, but it was cool inside. I was the only customer. A sign back of the cash register said that "Pete" was the bartender on duty. I pulled myself up onto a barstool and ordered a beer. He served it in a frosted mug and it was so deliciously cold that I poured it down before he had finished ringing up my money. I ordered another and looked the place over. It was like a thousand other neighborhood bars all over the country, all done by the same decorator, with orange walls, orange barstools, orange doors, blue ceilings with the lights coming out of little holes that look like stars, blue mirrors with tiers of bottles lined in front of them, and the smooth formica bar with ashtrays set in at intervals.

I started sipping my third beer

and felt the cool get through to me. It was like I was ten years younger. Pete was wiping imaginary rings off the bar with a damp cloth.

"Nice place you have here," I said.

"We try to keep it that way," he said, and smiled as though welcoming a little conversation during the slow part of the day. He seemed to be a man who would be easy to get along with. "Been here a little over six years now," he said. "You should have seen the place when we bought it. It was a real mess. My wife said I was out of my head to take it on, but it's paid off. It took a lot of hard work, but we have it nice now and we've managed to get rid of most of the riffraff that used to hang out in here. I like to run a nice clean place."

"It sounds like you enjoy your work," I said. "Most bar owners I run into are always crying the blues and talking about selling out."

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Granted, I put in long hours, and I don't expect to make a million, but I make a good living and I don't kill myself. What more can a man ask out of life?"

"That's one way to look at it," I said, "and I guess it's about the best."

"Anything a man does gives him trouble once in a while. He has to learn to live with it and roll with the punch. Once in a while you get a guy who's had too much before he comes in. You talk to him nice and the next thing you have him in a taxi to take him home. Women, I have to admit, are a little more trouble, but I find if you just water their drinks for a while, they'll either shape up or leave?"

"You mean it's that easy?"

"No," he laughed. "Sometimes you can smell trouble brewing. You get to know your customers. If strangers come in, looking for trouble, or if one of the regulars gets out of line, you ease out of sight and call the cops. It's surprising what the sight of a man in uniform will do to calm a place down in a hurry. My customers know that if any trouble starts, there'll be police here in minutes. I'm not going to get myself killed breaking up a fight. That's why I pay taxes."

"That sounds like the best way to handle things," I said.

"Usually it is," he said, then laughed again. "But one night it didn't work. If you're not in a hurry, I'll buy a drink and tell you about it."

"No hurry at all," I said.

He slid two fresh beers onto the bar, then came around front and

took the stool beside me. After taking a sip of his beer, and lighting a cigar, he said, "When I first took this place over we had plenty of trouble, but we gradually moved the rabble out and by the end of the first year we started getting a good class of trade. Not the hoity-toitys, but good, honest, hard-working people. It was just about that time when Gimpy started coming in regular. I'm not going to tell you his real name now, because that would spoil the story. I didn't know who he was then either, but that's why I love tending bar; you never know who that man in front of you really is, and you never know who your friends are until you need them."

"It's always that way," I said.

"Well," he continued, "this guy had one leg shorter than the other and his knee was stiff as a board. When he walked he had to swing the bad leg around in a sort of half circle to get it out of the way. The guys around here would have never called him Gimpy if he hadn't told them that was his name, and they never said it nasty, just in a friendly way that guys have when they want to show sympathy but don't know how to do it without sounding sissy."

Pete's cigar went out and he scratched a match and puffed until the smoke was steady again.

"Anyway, this Gimpy loved baseball, used to sit at the end of the bar nearest the TV set. He never missed a game, but the funny thing was, he never rooted for the home team. It didn't matter how good or bad they were doing, he never rooted for either team. The only thing that would get him excited was when some player, and it didn't matter which team he was on, would make a real fine play. Then he would pound on the bar and yell, 'That's the way to go, boy!'

"He didn't talk much at first. He'd just sit up there under the TV and watch the games all by himself. Then one night a couple of the guys got into an argument about one of the rules—I forget which one it was—and Gimpy cut in. He recited the rule and told them what number it was and what page it was on in the rule book.

"This was too much for the guys. One of them went home for his book, and it turned out that Gimpy was right. From then on, Gimpy was the respected authority on baseball in this neighborhood, and I used to get calls from other bars for Gimpy to settle arguments. His word on the rules was law." Pete paused in his narrative and went back of the bar to set up two more beers. I tried to pay him but

he shoved my money back. "We're just getting to the best part," he said.

"One night, it was after the ball game, just three of the regulars and Gimpy were here, and I was tending bar. This stranger comes in, and I could see he was trouble before he got to the bar. He'd had too much already and he didn't look old enough anyway, so I told him the bar was closed and he should stop back some other time. I no sooner turned my back than that little punk had stepped back of the bar and had a gun on me! He waved it at the guys at the bar, told them that nobody was to move, then he pointed the thing at me and told me that this was a stickup. That's when Gimpy moved. I didn't see it. He was sitting down at the other end of the bar where he always sits; all I saw was the blur of an ashtray as it whizzed by my face and caught that hood square on the temple. He went down in a heap and never moved. I kicked his gun out of reach, but it wasn't necessary. He didn't wake up for three days, and that was in the hospital under police guard."

Pete paused to light his cigar again and I lifted one of the ashtrays off the bar and tested it for heft. It must have gone a good twelve ounces. "Was it an ashtray

something like this one?" I asked.

"One just like it," Pete said. "It's a wonder he didn't kill the guy. It would have saved the state a lot of money if he had. The punk was wanted for murder up in Scranton; they pulled the switch on him about two years later . . . But the funny thing was the way Gimpy acted right after it happened. I started to call the police and he got real excited. 'Please, Pete,' he said, 'let me get out of here! Tell the cops that you were trying to get the gun away from him and one of the guys clobbered him.' He begged me, and the other guys nodded, so he got out real quick and I called the cops. With the record that hood had, there was no sweat. The cops were only too glad to have him, and I never even had to show up at a hearing."

"But why didn't Gimpy stay around?" I asked. "He didn't have anything to fear, helping you like he did."

"He was afraid of the publicity, he told us the next day. You see, Gimpy was in the big-time years ago. He was one of the great short-stops in baseball, but now he's crippled and works at a dental lab. He didn't want the papers to get hold of it and try to make a hero out of him. He said he didn't want anybody pitying him."

"He told you his name then?"

I asked, thinking I already knew.

"Smokey White!" Pete said triumphantly. "All those nights he sat in here and none of us knew who he was. Ain't that something! Smokey White, all crippled up by a bullet that he got in the leg when some guy tried to hold up a bar and he got in the way. It's almost poetic justice, him cutting that kid down after what happened to him."

"He still come in here?" I asked.

"You can count on it every night there's a ball game," Pete said. "If you're going to be in the neighborhood, stop in some night and meet him. He's a real fine man."

"I'd like to meet him," I said as I finished my beer. Then I shook hands with Pete and left.

It was hotter outside than it had been before. I felt the sweat oozing out of my forehead as I waited for the bus. I thought about Smokey White; real name, Marvin William White. He could dig a line grounder out of the dirt and whip the ball to the second baseman like a bullet . . . That's why they called him Smokey. He had spent one year in the minors after high school, then it had been right up to major league ball. For six years he had everybody talking. They were six fine years. Then he hit the skids. First, there was a fracas with a girl in a hotel room after



a night game. The club managed to quiet that down. Then there was a drunken brawl in an after-hours joint in Cleveland that the newspapers hinted at, but that was hushed up in a quick lawsuit that was settled out of court. After that, Smokey just sort of disappeared. There were little blurbs about him in the sport sections, how he had been injured in an accident, and how the writers wished him well, but then there were new faces and Smokey White faded into limbo. There was nothing more to say, and the sports writers know when to quit.

I was more limp than before by the time the bus arrived. I got aboard to go home and help Mamie pack, but it was more than the heat—I felt sick inside—and I knew I had been in Pete's Cozy

Corner for the first and last time.

You see, it had been a bullet from my Police Positive that had wrecked Smokey's knee ten years ago when he had been trying to get away from an attempted armed robbery . . . I had booked him as M. William White, and there had been so much hot news the next morning that the story was lost in the back pages and was hardly noticed. At least none of the sports writers had caught the scent.

So I won't go back to Pete's anymore. Smokey served his time and he's doing all right now. It was a brave thing he did, throwing that ashtray, and I'm not going to be the one to spoil it for him . . . I guess everybody deserves a place in somebody's hall of fame, even if it's just a nice neighborhood bar on the corner.



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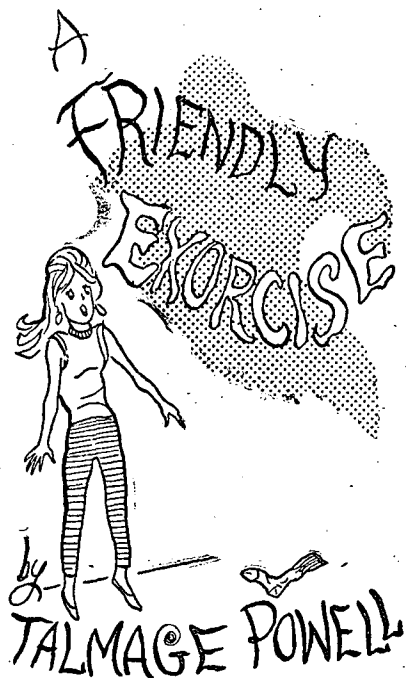
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*Pat Hitchcock*



*One who is faced with a mystery may have only a ghost of a chance at detection.*



I WAS putting up the traverse rods for the livingroom draperies when Judy let out a screech. She sounded like a woman who'd had the world's biggest mouse scurry between her feet.

The sound lifted me off the hassock where I'd been standing to add height to my somewhat bony

six-one. I jetted toward the source of the sound, skidding off the hallway into the empty bedroom.

Judy, the delectable, hadn't been frightened by a mouse. Instead, the culprit was a sweatsock. That's right, an ordinary white woolen sweatsock, misshapen and slightly bedraggled from having been laundered many times. It lay in the middle of the bare floor, and it had to be the source of her trouble. Besides Judy there was nothing else in the room. She stood pressed against the wall, elfin face pale, blue eyes round. Pointing at the sock, she tried to talk, getting hung up on the "J" in my name.

"J-J-J-Jim, that darn thing floated out of the closet and g-g-gave me a hug across the face!"

She was making no sense whatever to me. I gawked at her, and the expression on my face bugged some of the fright out of her. Her eyes began to flash.

"Don't you care that an old sweatsock floats out of a closet, halfway across an empty room, and nuzzles up to your bride, Jim Thornton?"

"Well, I . . . uh . . . Sure I care! But how could it have happened?"

"You tell me. You're the brain. All I know is what happened. When I'd finished putting things away in the bedroom, I came in here. I was thinking how we'd fix this room for a nursery some day. Then that sock . . ." She shuddered. "I wouldn't let my baby take a twenty minute nap in this room."

I detoured the sock, grinning at her. "Baby? Judy, you're pregnant already!"

She shook off my clutching hands. "Don't be silly! We've been married less than a month. I haven't had time to know if I'm pregnant or not. But when we do have a baby, James Arnold Thornton, you'd better have an explanation for anti-gravity sweatsocks, if we stay in this house."

I turned and sank to one knee beside the sock. I poked it with a finger. Nothing supernatural occurred. The sock was as commonplace and ordinary as . . . well, as old sweatsocks.

"When the Bicklefords moved out," I pronounced, "the sock was overlooked. It was probably in a dark corner of the closet shelf."

"Brilliant," said Judy, putting her sunny blonde head next to my drab brown thatch. "Of course it

was overlooked by their movers." "And a breeze happened to blow it across your face."

"Breeze?"

"Capricious breeze."

She tilted her head and gave me a look. "Capricious breeze in an empty room with the windows closed."

Her matter of fact tone was worse than sarcasm. My male ego recoiled. "Naturally," I said with a certain hauteur, "the first home I finagle with a mortgage company for my wife has to be fouled up with a poltergeist!"

She gingerly picked up the sock, stood, held the sock dangling at arm's length. "Now you're a little closer to the beam."

I stood up beside her, dusting my hands. "Come on, you can't be serious. You don't believe in zombies or voices from beyond the grave."

"Nope," she said, "but this sock is real as life. And poltergeists are too well authenticated to deny that *something* every now and then acts up in somebody's house. There have been any number of cases in England. And how about those people in Massachusetts whose house made the newspapers? And the house on Long Island—or was it in the Bronx—that was shown on the television newscast? Crockery flying all over the place in

that one—and a team of tough New York cops staked out the joint and saw some of it happen! You going to fly in the face of hard-bitten, super-realistic New York cops?”

“Not me,” I said helplessly.

“So there,” Judy said. She had riveted her gaze on the sock all this while. Now a strange mood seemed to have overtaken all of her initial fright. “You know, I really don’t think he was trying to frighten me. The touch of the sock was ever so gentle, a caress. I think he was trying to say hello and make friends. Still,” she glanced about, “I’m not sure we should plan a nursery in here.”

That’s where the subject rested for the moment. I wandered back to work, more concerned than I cared to show. In our recent college days, Judy and I had both been as far from the LSD crowd as you could polarize. Just a couple of the hard-studying non-jets that made up ninety-five percent of the student body, sans publicity, and floating sweatsocks didn’t fit into our pattern of living at all.

I finished hanging the living-room draperies, heard Judy safely rattling pots, pans, and crockery from their packing crates in the kitchen, and ambled quietly out the front door.

If it hadn’t been for that sweat-

sock, the day would have been perfect. Even if secondhand, the house was a cozy picture of antique brick and redwood. Judy and I hadn’t dared hope to start off so well. It had been pure luck that we’d picked up the house for practically nothing down and payments no higher than rent on a decent apartment. Wedding gifts and credit provided enough furniture to keep us from sleeping on the floor as a starter. Great luck, I’d thought. Now I was having second thoughts. Frankly, I was wondering why that Bickleford fellow had been so anxious to get out.

The house next door, to the west of us, was as quietly white collar as the rest of the neighborhood. The nameplate over the bell button said, “Tate Curzon.”

I used the button, and chimes sounded inside. The door opened a few inches and stopped.

“Yes?” he said. He had a voice like a loose violin string being stroked with a scratchy bow.

“Mr. Tate Curzon?”

“So what if I am?”

The door offered no further welcome, remaining just slightly open. From what I could see of him, he was a wiry, narrow shouldered little guy in his late forties or early fifties. He had a long red neck rising out of his starched

white collar, a narrow and cruel looking face, and a pinched-up bald pate that was so freckled it looked bloody. It was easy to behold the snappish visage and imagine a vulture's head.

I shuffled a bit uncomfortably. "Just thought I'd say hello. We're your new neighbors, James and Judy Thorton."

He looked me up and down, without approval. "I don't loan tools, carpet sweepers, fuse plugs or lawn mowers."

"No, sir." I jammed my hands into my slacks pockets. "I didn't want to borrow anything."

"Then you're not disappointed. You got any kids?"

"Not yet, Mr. Curzon."

"Good thing. I hate brats. Always breaking down my rose arbor and throwing trash in my fish pond."

"Yes, well . . . I guess the Bicklefords had kids?"

"One. Stupid oaf. Boy. Eighteen. Always roaring in and out of the driveway in that stupid sports car of his."

"Yes, sir," I said, agreeable as butter. "I guess all boys are that way with their first car."

"His first and last," Mr. Tate Curzon said on a note of malice.

"You mean—he smashed it up?"

"And himself with it. Skidded

one rainy night and went over the cliffs south of town. They picked up Andrew Bickleford—and his sports car—in little pieces."

"Gee, that's too bad!"

Mr. Curzon's eyes beaded. "You should care. Andy's mother had a nervous breakdown, and that nincompoop father couldn't put the house on the market fast enough."

The inference that I'd profited by a young stranger's death caused the heat to rise. I felt red from cheek to jaw. I let my eyes give Mr. Curzon's gimlet gaze tit for tat, and said stiffly, "Good day."

He slammed the door.

When I carried my burn back into my own premises I heard a couple of female voices in the kitchen. Judy and a blowsy and slightly brassy redhead of middle age were dunking teabags in Judy's new cups.

"Oh, hi, Jim. This is our neighbor, came over to say hello."

"Mrs. Curzon?" I asked, moving out of the doorway toward the kitchen table.

"Heavens, no," the woman laughed. "I'm Mabel Gosness. I live on the other side of you."

She chatted through the ritual of sipping tea and departed with the remark that it was wonderful to have young people in the neighborhood.

Judy carried the cups to the sink

and began washing them. "We had real talk before the male presence befell us."

"Did you now?"

"She seemed terribly lonely, eager for someone to talk with. She lives alone—her husband ran away with another woman nearly a year ago."

"Maybe one who talked less."

Judy looked over her shoulder long enough to stick out her tongue. "And guess what else?"

"I give. What?"

"On the other side of us is a mean little man named Tate Curzon. He hates everybody. Had four wives, no less, children by one of them. But even his own kids—they're grown up now—never go near him. Mrs. Gosness says we're to have nothing to do with him."

"Thanks for the advice, but I've met the gentleman."

"Honest?"

"Sure," I said, taking the cups and saucers from her to dry. "Went over and said hello. Wondered if he could tell me why Bickleford was so anxious to sell this house."

Judy practically wriggled. "And did you find out?"

I hesitated, balanced on the point of a fib, then realized she would find out from Mrs. Gosness anyway. So I told her about

young Andy Bickleford who'd been picked up in pieces and a mother whose mind hadn't been able to take it and a father-husband to whom the end of the world had come.

"I'll bet that sock was Andy's. The room must have been his." A suspicion of tears touched Judy's eyes.

By bedtime, our first day of settling into our new home had got our minds off the tragic Bicklefords. They were, after all, strangers, and the present was much too vivid. I lounged in the master bedroom in shorts, my sleeping apparel, nonchalantly pretending to read with the pillow stuffed behind my head. Actually I had the dressing room doorway framed in my vision over the edge of the book; and then the door opened and Judy stepped into the soft bedroom lighting wearing a nylon nightgown that was next to nothing. My civilized veneer barely stifled a roar of pleasure.

Hair brushed about her shoulders and a little smile of mystery playing across her mouth, she seemed to glide toward me. A remark on my pulse rate would be needless.

Then as she passed the bureau, a strange thing happened. A ten by twelve inch picture of me which Judy had framed suddenly

rose, hurled itself across the room and smashed against the wall.

The picture fell to the floor. There was a moment of dead silence, then a whispered tinkle as a bit of glass settled in the wreckage.

I sat up with the dream movements of a man swimming through molasses. Judy and I knelt beside the picture, neither wanting to touch it.

"Your gown must have brushed against it," I mumbled.

"And knocked it all the way across the room?" Judy said with fearful logic.

I gathered the bits of broken glass, piled them on the picture, and carried the wreckage to the bureau. Judy watched me, wide-eyed and steeped in her own thoughts.

As I turned from the bureau, the murder mystery I'd been pretending to read jumped up and down on the bedside table. The edge of the book cover jarred against the lampshade. The lamp teetered, fell with a crash. Darkness flooded the room.

I wasn't sure whether Judy or I moved first, but in an instant we were standing in shivery embrace.

"Maybe we should check into a motel for the night," I suggested through chattering teeth.

Judy's warmth stirred in my

arms. "Nope," she said, "I'm not being chased so easily out of our own house. Anyway, our poltergeist doesn't want to hurt us."

"What makes you so sure?"

"He hasn't thrown anything at us or on us," she said with supreme female logic. "He could have socked you with the picture frame if he were antagonistic."

"He's a sadist," I said, "who'd rather scare people to death a little at a time."

"Or a lonely fellow who's trying to tell us something," Judy mused. "He's certainly picking out a variety of items to toss around, which means he has method and purpose. If we could just get the message, I'm sure he'd go away and rest in peace."

Red-eyed and haggard, I muddled through my junior accountant's job the next day. I was worried about Judy's almost natural acceptance of the existence of a poltergeist. In the warm light of day, I just didn't believe what I had seen for myself. There had to be an explanation, like the juxtaposition of magnetic forces at the spot where our house stood.

I would have welcomed some advice, but could think of no source. My hard-headed, realistic boss was definitely out. If I went to the cops, the newspapers would pick it off the public record.



We'd be subjected to the same glare of publicity that had roasted every other family so rash as to reveal acquaintance with a poltergeist. I wondered how many, like myself, had preferred to suffer the inexplicable in silence.

The house looked as normal as peaches and cream when I hurried up the front walk. A bouncy and smiling Judy had a not-very-dry martini waiting, the kind I like. She'd also fractured her grocery budget with a two-inch-thick T-

bone steak, but I applauded her.

"No flying crockery today?" I asked as she slipped the steak under the broiler.

"Not even a saucer," she said.

"Maybe the strain proved too much for him," I said hopefully, munching the olive marinated in vermouth and gin.

We dined elegantly by candlelight, the table graced with snowy linen that had been a wedding present from my Aunt Ellen.

I'd had no appetite for lunch, but I worked like a scavenger on the steak. Judy served coffee, and we eyed each other across the table in affectionate silence.

The steak bone made like a Mexican jumping bean all of a sudden, rapping against the plate.

Judy blinked. I jumped. My chair tipped over backward. I grabbed the edge of the table and hung there, watching the bone jump up and down at eye level.

The bone made no threatening motions, but it was a desecration of our privacy. "Enough is enough," I snarled. I rose, cupped my hands, and pounced on the bone. It offered no resistance as I smacked it against the plate. I raised my fingers one at a time, and was a little miffed when the bone just lay there after it was freed.

I sneaked a glance at Judy.

"You did see that, too, didn't you?"

Judy nodded an affirmative, her eyes glinting. "I wonder what he meant?"

"Maybe that he's hungry," I growled. "Maybe you should brew him up a spot of newt's eyes over some sulphur and brimstone."

"Don't be facetious, Jim!"

"Facetious? I'm not even rational any longer."

While Judy washed the dishes and tidied up after dinner, I did a sneaky search of the house from attic to basement. I didn't find any wires, magnets, or other device remotely resembling the tools of a screwball practical joker.

When I went upstairs from the basement, Judy was curled in our new wing chair before the television set.

"You might have saved your time," she said with wifely forbearance. "I covered every nook and crack myself today. Not that I needed any more proof that we really have a poltergeist."

"I favor selling," I said. "I could put the place on the market by phoning the real estate agent at his home right now."

She sat up. "Don't you dare, Jim Thornton! This poor fellow got stuck here, and when he gets unstuck he will go away and leave us alone."

"Oh, yeah? And I suppose you



still think he's trying to deliver a message?"

"More than ever. That rattling bone meant something . . . if I could just figure out what. Why'd he wait all day until he had the bone to rattle, if he wasn't trying to tell us something?"

I eased to a sitting position on the hassock before her. "Judy," I said gently, "I think I'd better get you out of here before we spend another night in this place."

"Don't be sill! It's a perfectly lovely house."

"But all this talk . . ."

"He's a perfectly nice poltergeist—and I'm not going to leave." She smiled, leaned forward to pat my cheek. "Be a darling and flip the tuner to channel twelve. There's an hour-long comedy special coming up in about five minutes."

I not only switched the TV, I went and made myself a double-barreled martini, very dry this time. I sipped it and also its big brother while the hour-long was on. Six ounces of nearly straight gin later I settled back in the recliner, a wedding gift of Judy's cousin Ned. I clasped my hands across my midriff comfortably and prepared to think it out.

The TV music faded. The draperies seemed to waver and shake as my heavy lids blotted them out.

Lousy draperies, I thought vaguely, with their floral pattern of red roses. Just like Judy's Uncle Horace to give them to us . . .

I awoke with a muscular jerk that popped a crick out of my neck. I dropped the recliner to sitting position, running my tongue around the inside of my gin-wool mouth. A late newscast was on the television. A crashing mortar attack by guerrillas against an American base overseas seemed to have awakened me.

"Judy?" I said.

She was nowhere in the living-room, bedroom, or kitchen. I made the circuit, beginning to sweat hard by the time I'd come full circle.

The emptiness and silence of the house (except for the insistent TV) began to smother me. I turned off the set with a vicious flip of fingers that were trembling.

"Easy," I ordered myself. "If anything had happened, you'd have heard the ruckus."

Maybe she'd stepped next door to chin a-little with Mrs. Gosness and break the boredom of listening to a husband's snore.

I hurried to the east window, pulled the drapery aside; no lights over there. Mrs. Gosness was already off to dreamland, not sipping tea with a next-door neighbor.

I took jerky steps back to the middle of the room. My skin was turning icy and exuding a steam of sweat at one and the same time. If the house hadn't been haunted before, it certainly felt so now. The empty wing chair where Judy had been sitting seemed to throb in my vision. Then I saw that something new had been added. On the hassock before the chair, she'd laid a piece of paper, a pencil, and the magazine she'd used for a backing as she'd written.

I snatched up the paper. She hadn't left me a note. Instead, it was a record of her thoughts while I'd slept. Around the margin were curlicues where she'd doodled between words, sentences, phrases.

She'd written:

"The hints . . . sock . . . smashed picture . . . mystery novel . . . broken lamp . . . rattling bone . . . agitated rose-patterned drapes."

So the drapes had really shaken. I steadied the paper and kept reading.

"Sock . . . friendly . . . friendly Andy Bickleford . . . but picture smashed with a great deal of violence . . . picture of Jim . . . Jim's a male. . . only picture of male in house . . . male smashed by violence! Friendly Andy trying to say he was smashed violently? Not killed accidentally at all! Slugged, put in sports car, pushed over

cliffs! . . . Why? Because of something he'd done? . . . done bone . . . bone did . . . bone does . . . darn you, bone! . . . Well, let's see . . . If Andy didn't do anything, maybe he was undone because of something he'd witnessed . . . see bone . . . bone from T-bone steak, useless . . . except to a doggie . . . doggie would go out and bury bone . . . BURIED BONE . . . hidden weapon? . . . Buried weapon that killed Andy before he was stuffed in sports car and driven to those dreadful cliffs? . . . Buried where . . . Next hint, final clue, quaking draperies . . . draped for burial . . . nope . . . bedroom draperies weren't chosen . . . specific draperies . . . those in the living-room with roses . . . buried with roses . . . buried under roses . . . weapon buried under only rose arbor in neighborhood!"

I dropped the paper. The gimlet eyes and the scratchy violin-string voice flashed through my mind, "... hate brats. Always throwing trash in my fish pond and breaking my rose arbor."

The night coolness washed across my face before I even realized I'd run outside. A pale moon bathed our backyards, ours and Mr. Tate Curzon's. I slipped through the shadows cast by our house, my eyes seeking and searching.

Then I heard a muffled cry and jerked my attention from the rose arbor next door. I saw the struggling shadows near Mr. Curzon's basement door. He heard my pounding footsteps, and as my presence loomed over him, Curzon shoved Judy sprawling and laid a hard little fist in my kisser.

My knees buckled and my nose dug a furrow. He kicked me hard in the ribs. Breath whoofed out, but as he spun and started to run away, my grabbing hand found an ankle. I yanked, and this time Mr. Curzon fell. He writhed around and started lashing me with his fists. I disliked picking on such a little fellow, but he ignored my orders to lie still, so I grabbed him by his thin neck and popped his head against the hard ground. It proved to be an anesthetizing measure. He would remain unconscious for several minutes at least.

Judy grabbed my arms, helped me to my feet. Then she put her arms around me and collapsed against my chest.

"Oh, Jim! I was peeping about his rose arbor and suddenly he was there. He grabbed me, and I screamed just once before he—"

I tipped her face up and kissed her. She began to sob with relief. I picked her up and my shoulder

was a very nice cradle for her head.

"I think we'd better call the police," I said.

We thought it discreet to omit mention of the poltergeist, inferring to the police that Mr. Curzon had been acting strangely around his roses and launched his murderous attack when Judy's curiosity got the better of her.

It turned out that the police had previously questioned Mr. Curzon in the disappearance of one of his wives. Their probe of the rose arbor turned up the remains of the fourth Mrs. Curzon. Perhaps it was suspicion or evidence of this that led to Andy Bickleford's untimely demise.

We can't know for sure. The poltergeist hasn't been around since that fateful night, and if the subject came up, Judy and I would be first to agree that nobody in his right mind could believe in poltergeists. Like all the silent others who've shared similar experiences, we don't want our friends thinking we are soft in the head.

I do, however, feel the poltergeist should have assisted a bit longer. An army of cops and insurance investigators are going nuts trying to find out what happened to Mrs. Curzon's numbers one, two, three.

*A preemptive victory can be more deleterious than an anticipated defeat.*



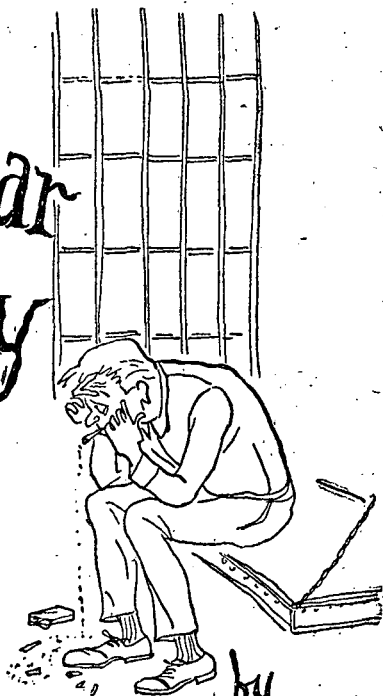
# Familiar Victory

I'M AFRAID you're lying, Mr. Hastings," the police lieutenant said mildly; so mildly that at first I didn't grasp the import of his words. Then I did.

I sat forward in my chair and tried to meet his gaze. He was a large, rumpled man with an ironic quirk to his lips and dark-circled eyes. He was about my age, forty or so.

"Now, look here," I said; and tried to sound indignant.

"No, you look here," the lieutenant snapped. "We can prove that you're lying about a couple of things, and that in turn tears down your whole story about what hap-



by  
**Elijah Ellis**

pened to your wife this afternoon. You botched it, Hastings."

I studied the pattern in the brown and gray rug under my

feet. There was no help there. I experienced the grinding sense of failure that was a familiar feeling with me, but insisted, "I've told you the truth."

Neither of the detectives, Lieutenant Snyder and a Sergeant named Corsi, bothered to answer. The three of us were in the living-room of my apartment. It was almost midnight, and I was tired, very tired; and afraid—though not for the obvious reason. It hadn't yet occurred to me that I might be charged with murdering my wife.

Now Sergeant Corsi spoke for the first time since the two detectives had arrived, a quarter of an hour before. "Why don't you tell us what actually happened here? Get it off your chest. You'll feel a lot better."

I shook my head.

"All right. Let's go over it once more," Lieutenant Snyder said. "You got home a little after five this afternoon. Your wife wasn't in the apartment. You noticed that the back door of the kitchen was open, so you stepped out onto the little porch. You saw your wife lying down at the foot of the service stairs. You ran down the steps and found that she was dead—evidently from the fall. Is that right?"

I scrubbed a hand over my face. "I told you all this when you were here before. Told you, and told

you, yet you still question—" "Is that right?" the lieutenant repeated.

"Yes, that's right," I cried.

"No, that's wrong. You were seen entering this building at four-thirty, not five o'clock."

"Well, I—I could have been mistaken about the time."

"Yeah. Half an hour, forty-five minutes worth . . . You found your wife at the foot of the service stairs. You assumed she'd fallen. Right?"

I nodded warily.

"Wrong again," Sergeant Corsi said. "Oh, she fell, all right, but she was dead at the time."

I blurted, "How—"

"How do we know?" Lieutenant Snyder broke in. "From the medical examiner. Your wife was strangled to death, Mr. Hastings. She died at approximately three in the afternoon, more than two hours before you say you found her."

I could feel large beads of sweat sliding down my face. I hadn't thought of that. I'd been in such a panic I hadn't thought of anything, except getting Marie's body out of the apartment and trying to make it look as if she'd died accidentally.

Yes, I'd botched it, all right.

"And please don't try to tell us that she must have been murdered down there in the back yard where

you found her. The people who have the ground-floor apartment under yours, a Mr. and Mrs. Brown, came in that way just a few minutes before five, and they would've had to step over the body to reach their back door. They didn't. How about it, Hastings?"

"I don't know." I was trying desperately to think of some feasible explanation but my brain seemed frozen.

"You still say you told us the truth?"

"Yes. Yes!"

"Have it your way, then." The two detectives got to their feet. Lieutenant Snyder said, "You're under arrest; Mr. Hastings, for the murder of your wife, Marie Hastings. I advise you that you're entitled to counsel, and under no obligation to make any statement—"

He went on speaking, but I didn't hear him. Incredible as it sounds, until that moment I hadn't realized I could be suspected of killing Marie.

In a daze, I let the two detectives guide me out of the apartment, waiting while Corsi turned off lights and locked the front door, and then on out of the building to their car.

During the ride to police headquarters, Corsi, who was beside me in the back seat, asked softly, "Why did you kill her? Just a sudden

burst of anger about something? Heck, I can understand that. My wife and I fight like cats and dogs."

I turned to stare at him with genuine amazement. "I didn't kill her. I loved her more than anything in the world. I can't even imagine myself hurting her. I loved her!"

It was the truth, and that overriding truth was the reason I could not admit the lesser truth—not to anyone; not even to myself.

At headquarters the questioning began in earnest, but only after more explanations of my rights, and the signing of waivers, and more explanations at such tedious length that at another time it might have been amusing.

I stuck to my story, with the single admission that I had been wrong about the time I got home.

On a couple of occasions I noticed Sergeant Corsi staring at me, his forehead wrinkled in thought, as if he were trying, without success, to make me out.

Finally, at four in the morning, I was booked into jail, put into a cell, and left alone. I was so tired I could hardly stand up, but there was no question of sleep. Instead, I sat on the edge of the iron bunk, smoked cigarettes one after the other; and, though unwillingly, I thought about the afternoon be-

fore, reconstructed it mentally.

I'd been out of the city most of the day on business, and when I returned I drove straight home without checking in at the office. I worked for a public relations firm that represented a number of small businessmen. My day had been lousy, as usual, and I was feeling depressed and out of sorts when I keyed open the apartment door and went inside.

The first thing I saw was my wife, Marie. She was sprawled on the livingroom floor near the sofa. Her face was turned away, hidden by the mass of her shiny dark hair, and I thought she was asleep—at first.

I knelt beside her, vaguely noticing that she wore only underclothing and a filmy pink negligee that I hadn't seen since our honeymoon, a year and a half before.

"Marie?" I said numbly. "What happened—"

Then I saw her face, and the faint bruises marring the white skin of her throat. I fumbled for her wrist and tried to find a pulse, but she was dead, her flesh already cool to the touch. For a time I just squatted there beside her, staring at her face, lovely even in death.

Finally I roused enough to look around the room. A chair lay on its side, but that was the only sign of a struggle. Two half-empty

highball glasses were on the coffee table, and an ashtray containing a few cigarette butts. They weren't my brand, and Marie didn't smoke.

I got slowly to my feet and crossed to the open door that led into our bedroom. When I'd left that morning, the big double bed had been neatly made up. It wasn't now.

"No," I whispered, and shook my head violently. "No!"

A lot of things I had refused to see during the last few months crushed in on me now—Marie's evasiveness sometimes, the sidelong glances, the way she'd acted when I had to be out of town overnight on business, as if she could hardly wait to see me go—but I simply couldn't, wouldn't believe that there was another man. That my wife had a—lover.

I had failed at everything I had ever tried; miserable, grinding little failures, without even the redemption of tragedy; at school, in business, and now this—failure as a man.

If I admitted that I couldn't hold my wife, what was left? Nothing; just—nothing.

I walked to the bed and hurriedly straightened the sheets, pulled the spread up over the pillows and smoothed out the wrinkles. Then, still without conscious thought, I returned to the living-

room. I set the overturned chair upright. I emptied the ashtray and washed the two highball glasses and put them away in the kitchen. I went through the apartment, but found nothing else out of the way.

That left only Marie.

I knelt again beside her body. I said, "It was my fault. I'm sorry. I loved you. I'm sorry it wasn't enough . . ."

For the last time I gathered her up in my arms. I carried her out to the tiny back porch. There was no one in sight in the brick-paved courtyard below. I stood at the top of the steep flight of steps, closed my eyes, and let her limp body fall away.

I went back inside and called the police. "There's been an accident," I said. "A terrible accident."

The time was five-fifteen. I honestly didn't know I'd been in the apartment forty-five minutes.

The police came, led by Lieutenant Snyder. At first he and the others were quite sympathetic. They seemed to believe my story, and that Marie had been on the porch, somehow lost her balance and fallen down the outside stairs. They left about seven o'clock.

I'm still not sure just what I did between then and the time Snyder and Corsi returned. I dimly remember pacing about the silent apartment, going again and again

to the bedroom to look at the now neatly made bed.

I don't know. I suppose I was trying to convince myself that what I told the police was true, that I had imagined the rest of it. That since there was no sign now that Marie had entertained a man there, that afternoon—it hadn't happened.

Crazy? Who's to say, unless he's been in my position, with my drab background of never-ending failure?

Strangely enough, I didn't feel any great hate or rage toward the man who had made love to my wife—and then killed her. I had no idea who he was. Someone from Marie's past, perhaps, or even someone I knew and thought of as a friend.

I didn't know—and didn't want to know.

Now, in the small isolated cell at the city jail, I ground out a last cigarette on the concrete floor and lay back on the bunk and tried to sleep.

An hour later they came for me. The questioning resumed. At first I tried answering the questions, but after awhile I simply sat there in the dingy, cigar-smelling room on the second floor of the jail, and stared into space.

Then Lieutenant Snyder threw up his hands, and said, "Hastings,



let's face it. Either you murdered your wife yourself, or you're trying to cover up for the murderer. Either way you're guilty!"

"Yes," I muttered, surprising even myself. "Yes, yes, I'm guilty. Now leave me be."

In the silence that followed, I saw Corsi's face. He was looking at me as he had the night before, a puzzled, unsatisfied look, but it didn't bother me.

I was enjoying the wave of relief that had suddenly washed over me. I was guilty; guilty of being a futile, rather ludicrous man—made a fool of by a wife he loved beyond reason—and to me that was worse than being thought a killer.

At last they let me go back to my cell. I wasn't bothered again for several hours. Lunchtime came and I found that I was hungry, even for the unappetizing mess the jailer handed me on a tin plate, along with a plastic spoon.

After I'd eaten, I sipped black coffee from a tin cup, and smoked a cigarette. I felt almost—good.

I can't really explain it. There I was, facing a charge of first-degree murder, with every chance of going to prison for life for a crime I hadn't committed, wasn't even capable of committing.

My life was ruined. My relatives and few friends would despise me. Thousands, millions, of people

who had never seen or heard of me before would hate me, curse me as a killer—but no one would laugh at me.

The real killer? I had an idea he had too many worries about trying to save his own skin to spend any time laughing at me, or anything else.

Yes, I actually felt good.

Then, along toward evening, Sergeant Corsi appeared in the corridor outside my cell. He was alone. "Wanted to check something with you," he said.

I studied his rather narrow, olive-skinned face. "What is it?" I asked.

"You told us that you came home at roughly two-thirty yesterday afternoon. You and Mrs. Hastings got into an argument about money—she wanted to buy a fur coat, and so on. You got mad, finally. You grabbed her by the throat and choked her. When you realized she was dead—"

"I panicked," I said. "I ran out, and drove around the city, trying to think of some way to get away with it."

"Uh huh. So you decided to make it look like an accident. Figured that was better than running. That about it?"

I nodded, and he turned abruptly and walked away.

Puzzled, I stood there at the

door a moment, gripping the cold steel bars. I wasn't sure I cared for Sergeant Corsi.

Actually I'd still been in a suburb of the city at two-thirty the day before. My last appointment had ended about two, and I spent the next hour or so in a bar, brooding over a couple of drinks. I'd never been in that bar before, and there was no reason anyone there should remember me.

With a shrug I lay down on my bunk and waited for the jailer to bring my supper—and I thought about Marie.

She was so lovely, so very lovely. It was hard to believe I'd never see her again, never hold her pliant body in my arms again, and yet—

I sat up suddenly on my bunk.

I had loved her, yes, and yet I wasn't altogether sorry that she was dead. Now she was mine forever. All mine. In a way she was much closer than she'd ever been before . . .

Slowly I lay back and reached for a cigarette and lit it. I closed my eyes, and saw Marie smiling gently at me. Now she came toward me, her arms outstretched, her eyes dancing with invitation.

"Darling," I whispered. "I love you so . . ."

The night passed, and the next day, and the next night. No one came near me except the jailer

with my meals. I began to discover that jail wasn't really too bad.

I had no decisions to make, no business problems, no appointments to keep. There was not much of anything I could do about anything, even if I wanted to, so why worry?

I'd never been in the armed forces, but men who had sometimes had tried to explain the paradoxical freedom of regimentation. Everything is so simple when you don't have to think for yourself, just do what you're told.

Now I was beginning to see what they meant. I found that I was almost looking forward to going to prison.

After all, now that my Marie only lived within my mind, what was there for me in the outside world? Nothing.

At mid-morning of my third day in jail, two officers I didn't know came to me. They only shook their heads at my questions, but they didn't seem unfriendly. One of them was actually smiling as we left the jail and crossed a patch of sun-drenched lawn to the headquarters building. The glare hurt my eyes after the cool dimness of my cell.

They took me to an office filled with men. Lieutenant Snyder came forward, grinning ruefully. "I don't know what to do about you," he

said. "I should belt you one, but there are . . ."

I looked around, uncomprehending.

Sergeant Corsi was leaning against the wall beside the door. He gave me a sardonic nod.

"You can thank Corsi there for saving you," Snyder was saying. "For some reason, the guy didn't believe your confession."

I mumbled, "I don't—"

"Remember when we brought you in?" Corsi said. "You told me how you loved your wife—and I just never could buy the idea you were faking. No matter what you said, later on."

I still didn't understand.

Snyder said, "On his own time, Corsi did some in-depth checking on your story, Mr. Hastings. He found that bar over in Perryville where you were during the time your wife was killed. After that, it was easy."

There was an empty chair close to where I was standing. I went to it, sat down, and buried my face in my hands.

"Once we knew for sure that

you were innocent, it was just a matter of routine," Corsi said quietly. "Checking into your wife's background, her friends, and so on, almost at once we came up with a name—Thomas Derrick. Know him?"

I shook my head without speaking.

"Uh huh. Well, your wife did. Derrick cracked the minute we put pressure on him. He'd been seeing your wife, but then he wanted to break it off—and your wife didn't. So he blew his top and killed her."

Some man in the group murmured, "What I'll never understand is why this guy confessed."

I looked up at Lieutenant Snyder. "It'll all come out now, about Marie—and this Derrick."

"Oh, sure. But you're clean, Mr. Hastings. You're free."

I dropped my eyes to the floor, and felt the old, gray sense of defeat. I'd failed again. I got up and walked over to Corsi.

"Thank you, Sergeant," I said. "Thank you very much."

I wondered if he could see the hatred in my eyes.



*"Everything that deceives may be said to enchant." And vice versa?*



**W**HEN Rosy Rohan was told to report to Captain Tinker's office the minute he came off his beat that sunny spring afternoon, he was troubled. The summons to the captain's office didn't necessarily mean that he'd done something

wrong, because he couldn't remember any foul-up, but Captain Tinker was a hard, humorless little man whom Rosy would just as soon avoid, if possible.

The captain wore a little smile that was almost friendly when Rosy walked in. He even came around from behind his desk, motioned Rosy to a chair, then perched on the desk top in front of him. He was fifty, grayed, wrinkle-faced, hard-eyed, with a wiry body that moved something like a cat. Nobody ever messed around with Captain Tinker even though he was small.

"I'll get right down to it, Ro-

han," he began. "I saw you playing basketball at the gym the other day, and you've got nice legs."

Rosy knew the captain wasn't in the habit of making jokes, so for lack of a better answer he said, "Thank you, Captain."

"Nice and white and smooth. Not much hair on 'em. Kind of shapely too." He leaned forward suddenly and peered into Rosy's face. "Round apple cheeks, fair complexion. How often do you shave, Rohan?"

"Every day, sir."

"You're kidding. I'll bet it's every other day. How do you like your beat, Rohan?"

"Oh, Maywood's a nice area, sir."

"It sure is. Too nice. Don't you ever get bored out there?"

"Sir, a policeman shouldn't object when people obey the law."

"Wouldn't you like a little action?"

"Naturally, sir, if you mean—"

"How's your judo?"

"I passed the course, sir."

"How about joining the Decoy Squad?"

Rosy gulped unhappily. "You mean, sir . . ."

"You know what I mean. Dress up like a woman and try to attract the attention of our sidewalk muggers. Now look, Rohan, before you start with the excuses, let me point out a few things. You've seen the

figures, so you know the kind of problem we have. Other towns have used decoys, and sometimes it works out real good. Well, we're going to start, but look at the gorillas we've got on this force. Every one of 'em's got a black beard that grows an inch a day, the manliest bunch of bluecoats in the whole country. Now don't get me wrong, Rohan. I ain't saying you're not manly. But you're young, and you got that light beard, and the damndest prettiest legs since Betty Grable."

"Do you want me to volunteer, Captain?"

"It would save me the trouble of talking some more, Rohan."

"All right, Captain, I volunteer."

They had a meeting that night in the captain's office, attended by four other "volunteers" besides Rosy. There were a few minutes of self-consciousness and the usual jokes, and Captain Tinker listened patiently. Then they began discussing plans and strategy.

Tinker had a big map of the city tacked on the wall, and the locations of recent muggings, assaults, purse snatchings, stickups, and similar crimes were marked with red pins. The pins tended to cluster in a few distinct areas. One of the areas was Center Park.

"Center Park is the toughest nut of all." The captain had another

map to show why. It was a detailed topographical map of the park, with every walk, bench, tree and bush drawn in. "See what I mean?" the captain continued. "It's a mugger's paradise. No wonder we've had so much crime there, a lot of it in broad daylight. It would take fifty men to patrol the place."

The five members of the new Decoy Squad must have looked blank, because the captain went on to explain further. "Center Park was planted and arranged back in the good old days when a young man's idea of a date was to take his girl for a stroll and then a sit on a park bench in the moonlight. Look at the way the trees and bushes cut the place up into a hundred little private nooks. The old guy who figured this out must have been real romantic."

"Why don't we get rid of some of the trees and bushes?" Rosy suggested.

"Good idea, Rohan," the captain said. "Had it myself a long time ago. Make the park just one big expanse of green grass. Do a complete face-lifting job. But the city fathers won't hear of it. Don't ask me why. I just work here, same as you. They'd rather have the trees and bushes and the crime, I guess."

The men received their tentative assignments that night. Three of the squad were detailed to work

other parts of town. A fourth was paired with two plainclothes detectives to roam the park at night. Rosy Rohan fell heir to perhaps the most dangerous job—a daytime solo.

"Hey," Georgie said softly, "how about her?"

Georgie had thick black curly hair, long dark eyelashes, and smooth ivory skin. He was slim and not too tall, but he had wide shoulders and he was muscular and quick. Georgie was a bright boy, too, even though he hadn't spent much of his life in school.

"That purse looks fat," Len said. Len was pimply-faced, and his blond hair kept falling over his forehead no matter how many dozens of times a day he combed it.

Georgie grinned. "Confucius say, girl who take lunch to work save much money."

"Yeah, but does she carry it around in her purse?" This objection came from Coke. He was a short, fattish boy, bigger in the hips than in the shoulders. It was Georgie who had nicknamed him for his resemblance to a Coke bottle.

"Smart boy," Georgie said approvingly. "Maybe all this money she saves she keeps in the bank. Or gives it to her poor old sick mother."

"How can you tell though," Len

wondered, "unless you snatch the purse and take a look?"

Concealed by a hedge as tall as themselves, the trio spied upon their potential prey. They knew exactly how safe they were from observation. Center Park was their territory. It was paid for by the taxpayers, and trespassed upon by strangers, but essentially and intrinsically it belonged to Georgie and Len and Coke; to Georgie mostly. He was lord of the domain.

"What do you say, Georgie?" Len asked urgently.

"And have another dame go screaming to the cops for practically nothing?" Coke was a congenital coward. "We can do this just so often, you know, before the cops close this place up."

"Hey, we'll do this," Georgie decided. "We'll walk by slow for a real look. You know how dames are sometimes. If they've got money in their purses and somebody comes around, they sort of grab for 'em and pull 'em in closer."

They left the hedge and sauntered down the cement walk. Three abreast, hands in their pockets, cigarettes dangling from their lips, they made no pretense of being hard-working shipping clerks on their lunch hour. They looked just what they were, and were proud of it.

Slower and slower they moved as they approached the bench. Their stare was insolent, at the nyloned legs mostly, and at the black patent leather purse sitting there, carelessly, six inches away from the girl's hip. The girl was paying no attention at all, just munching away at that silly sandwich and never taking her eyes off that stupid magazine. They might even have—or so Len thought anyway—just picked up the purse and the girl wouldn't have known it was gone, but Len got a surprise. Georgie didn't give the nod, and they walked all the way past, out of sight.

"Whatsa matter?" Len demanded in an angry whisper. "Why didn't we take it? It would've been easy."

"I don't like the setup," Georgie said.

"Whatsa matter?"

"I got a very delicate nose. Something just didn't smell good."

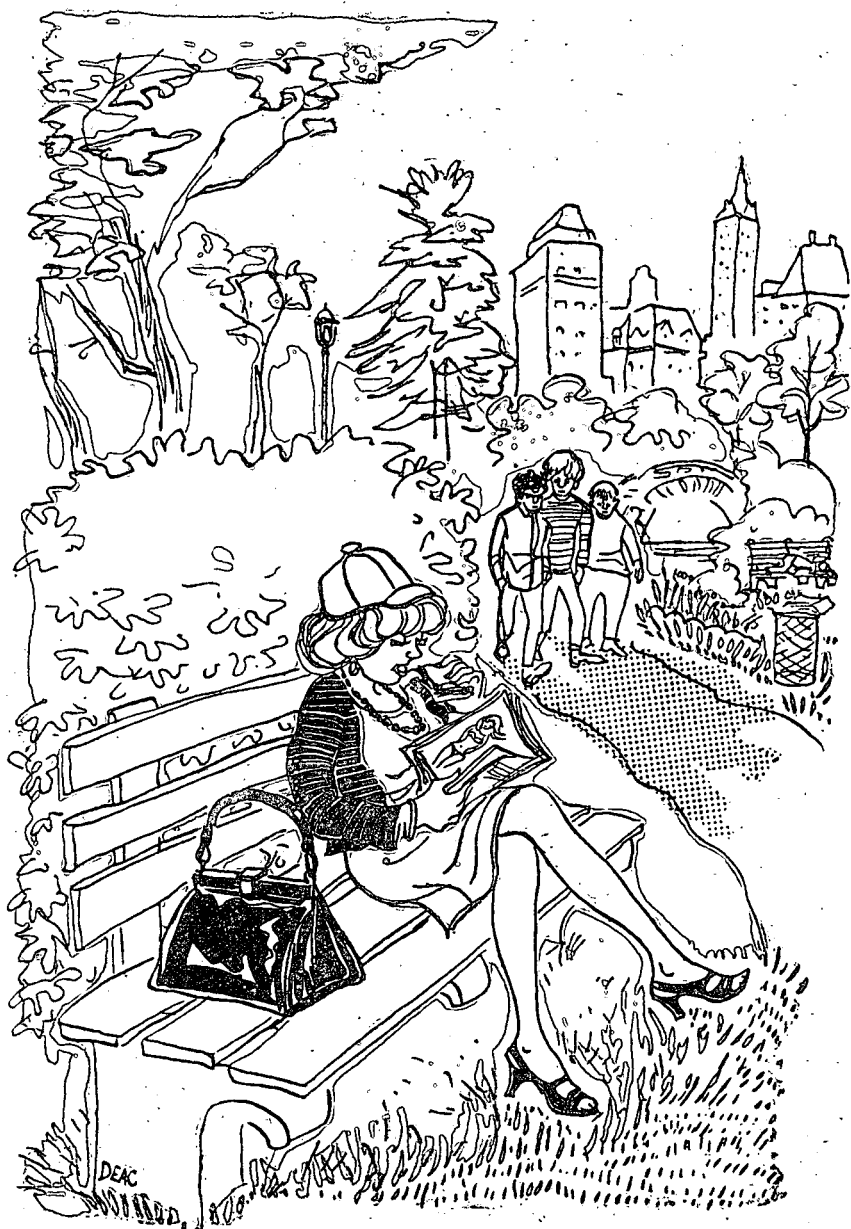
"Whatsa matter?"

"The magazine the dame had. Did you see the picture she was looking at? A dame in a bikini."

"Whatsa matter with that? Maybe she was wondering how she'd look in one."

"Or maybe something else. I got a feeling this ain't no ordinary dame sitting there."

Rosy Rohan watched the three





punks saunter by. They looked like just the customers he was waiting for with their swagger, the clothes they wore. Wearing black jackets, they didn't seem to be honest office boys on their lunch hour. These characters were obviously unemployed, on a permanent lunch hour, so they had to get their spending money somewhere. Why didn't they grab the purse sitting so temptingly there all by itself?

He squirmed and scratched a little when they weren't looking. His legs and feet seemed naked in the sheer nylons and open-toed shoes. Everywhere else he felt hemmed in, by the garter belt, the padding, the itchy wig, the goop on his face. The only spot where he was comfortable was his left armpit, where his automatic snuggled in its holster.

He stared at the picture of the girl in the bikini and shuddered. Next thing, Captain Tinker would be suggesting that he go out on the beach in one. He gulped down the last bite of sandwich. He'd wanted to bring three sandwiches, a slab of pie and a thermos of coffee, but Captain Tinker had insisted that one sandwich was all a slightly overweight stenographer would eat, and they had to be authentic. He looked at his wristwatch, a fancy, feminine item that should

have been an enticing target too. Past one o'clock already; he couldn't stay any longer without obviously loitering, so he retrieved his purse, stood up and staggered away precariously on his high heels. Angry and disappointed, he wondered why those three punks didn't jump him.

For the fifth time they walked by at an insolently slow pace. The girl on the bench went right on munching the sandwich and staring at the magazine. As they came abreast, the three punks made remarks that were more than loud enough to her, but the girl appeared utterly absorbed in the magazine, and didn't seem to hear them. Georgie flipped his still-burning cigarette, intending it to land on the magazine, but it missed and landed instead on the bench between the girl and her purse, where it continued to burn. The girl neither looked up nor uttered a single word of protest. The trio, at Georgie's nod, went on.

When they reached the concealment of a hedge Georgie asked, "Anybody want to argue now? He won't let us get a good look at his face, and he won't say anything so we can hear his voice. He's a cop all right."

The other two wore glum expressions. "He's been sitting there

all week now, Georgie," Len said. "How do we get rid of him?"

"It's making me nervous," Coke added. "I have to look twice at every skirt now to see if there's a cop in it."

"He knows we're wise," said Len. "Why does he hang around?"

"'Cause somebody told him to," Georgie explained. "All cops are dumb."

"What do we do?"

"We'll do something."

Rosy Rohan complained to his superior, "It's been a week now, Captain. I sit there and eat a sandwich, and every day these same three punks walk by. They're some boys we want, I'm sure, but I can't make them jump me. They know who I am. I just don't make a very good female, Captain."

Captain Tinker listened patiently, his elbows on the desk, his fingertips pressed together, his eyes shrewd and hard. "You want to quit the squad, Rosy?" he asked finally.

"It's just that I'm not getting anywhere, Captain, and my girlfriend, Rita—"

"Rita? Yes, of course. What does she think?"

"She thought I was a cop. Now she thinks I'm a sissy."

"So you want to quit on account of what Rita thinks?"

"I'm not accomplishing anything . . ."

"You're accomplishing one thing, my lad. The hoods who hang around Center Park, including your three, are all a little nervous since they've guessed we're using decoys. Center Park has become the safest place in town, so you're not exactly wasting your time, lad. Stay on the job."

Consuela's perfume was much too strong, her makeup too garish, her clothes cheap. There was a predatory glitter in her dark eyes, a hardness about her mouth, a brittleness in her talk and laughter, yet none of these faults could conceal the fact that she was a beautiful girl—an early-blooming flower.

Georgie inspected her approvingly when she met them at the entrance to the park. On the way to the rendezvous, he explained to her what needed to be done. She giggled with malicious appreciation, but when he was finished she had a practical question. "What's in it for me?"

"Kicks. What else?"

"And I take all the chances while you just stand around and watch?"

"We won't let anything happen."

"Yeah, I trust you."

"You're my woman, ain't you?"

She seemed less convinced by that assurance than by the prospect

of some enjoyable devilment. She giggled again, tossed her long pony-tail, and said she was ready.

Rosy Rohan sat on his accustoming bench in a mood of despair, but carefully maintained his established pose, the sandwich, the magazine, the purse a whole tempting foot away from him. It was no use. The punks hadn't come around. They knew exactly what he was, and that he'd be safely planted on this bench for a certain period of time. Captain Tinker was crazy. The punks would be somewhere else in the park, and somebody would be robbed today.

Besides, Rosy was uncomfortable. Wearing the feminine disguise was a worse torture every day. The weather had grown perceptibly warmer. The wig itched more, the garter belt pinched and rubbed, the topper made him sweat but he couldn't take it off. Despite his pretty legs, he had shoulders which definitely identified him as a man. Too, there was the automatic in its holster.

The magazine was boring. He'd have to invest in a new one. The sandwich was tasteless, and he was thirsty. Maybe tomorrow, he ruminated, he could bring a cold bottle of pop with a straw in it. That would look feminine.

Because he had to keep his head down and pretend to read, he

didn't see the girl till she was rather close. Then he saw a swing of hips, the entrancing swirl of a skirt from side to side, and an enticing flutter of nyloned legs, as bright as butterfly wings in the noon sunlight. His eyes followed the progress of this vision, expecting it to sail past all too soon. Instead, it slowed, lingered and then, with a breezy billow of skirt, the creature sat down on the bench.

Rosy was curious. He just had to see the girl's face. Lifting his head, he peered out from under the frizzy edges of his wig. The girl was beautiful!

Rosy's admiration for comely members of the opposite sex was no secret, but he wasn't a skirt-chaser. He was, if anything, shy when it came to direct contact with these marvelous concoctions. Though Rita might vehemently disapprove, he worshipped them from afar, willy-nilly, blonde, brunette, and redhead.

This one was a brunette, with a saucy profile, long defiant dark lashes, an impertinent nose, daring, impudent lips. She turned her head ever so slightly, and one smoldering eye met him so challengingly that he quickly dived for the safety of his magazine.

"You mind if I sit here?"

He shook his head till the wig began to feel insecure. Then he

mumbled something in a sort of falsetto.

The girl settled more comfortably on the bench. Her perfume began to permeate the breeze. Rosy didn't dare check whether she was looking at him. All he could see was her knees. Her skirt was short, the breeze brisk, and she had very pretty knees.

"Got a light?" She was suddenly leaning far across the intervening space, her hand was on his knee, and her face, with a cigarette dangling from her bright red lips, was thrust almost into his.

His reaction, though several seconds slow, was violent when it came. He jumped up and away from the girl, spilling his magazine and lunch sack onto the ground, and twisting his left ankle as he too quickly put his weight on those slim high heels.

"I don't smoke." The voice came out baritone.

Quickly the girl got up, and Rosy watched her swivel-hipped walk as she left by the same path by which she'd arrived. He watched her till she disappeared into the greening foliage of the nearest hedge. Despite the pain in his ankle, he admired her lithe, sinuous grace, her dancer's calves and slim ankles.

When she had gone he tried to readjust his wig, then bent to pick

up the scattered debris, the lunch sack and the magazine. It was only then that he discovered his purse was missing.

"He's a man all right," Consuela assured the three. "I grabbed his knee, didn't I?" And I got a good look at his face. He was wearing lots of pancake and powder and stuff, but underneath you could see he had a beard."

Moving to a place where they couldn't be observed, they gathered into a tight circle and opened the fat purse. It was stuffed with wadded newspaper.

"Them cheap cops!" Georgie snarled.

Captain Tinker's baleful stare forced Rosy's eyes to the floor, where he studied with great concentration the worn spots in the carpet. Over his bent head the captain's invective flowed like an angry river.

"Ah, Rohan, you're the pride of the department. The mayor will be giving you a medal for this. Just wait till the papers get hold of it, and they're bound to. Member of the Decoy Squad out to catch purse snatchers gets his purse snatched. How? Because the punks fool him completely. They send a girl. That confuses our lad. He forgets he's supposed to be a girl himself, and not supposed to be inter-

ested in other girls. That's how much he concentrates on his job. That's how alert he is. He gets taken in completely by a bunch of punks. Result of the operation, nothing. Cost to the city, a week's patrolman's salary and one purse."

"At least there wasn't any cash in it," Rosy pointed out hopefully.

The captain's eyes narrowed to become tiny crevices in his already lined face. "Rohan, what kind of duty are you plugging for? A school crossing maybe?"

"Oh, not that, Captain! Rita would—"

"Or maybe you'd like to transfer to the department of sanitation."

"Captain, I want to go right back to Center Park, even if it's on my own time . . ."

Georgie couldn't believe what his eyes saw. "Hey, it's that gorgeous hunk of cop!"

"I thought we'd taught him a lesson," Coke moaned.

"I don't get it," Georgie said, shaking his head and letting his dark curly locks tumble in the wind. "I just don't get it. The guy can't be that dumb. He knows we're onto him. So what's he doing sitting there again?"

"Let him waste his time if he wants to," Len suggested. "We can operate someplace else, can't we?"

Georgie went on shaking his head. "No, no. We got to do some-

thing about this lousy cop. We gotta get rid of him . . . for keeps."

They watched from their hiding place. The cop was acting exactly the same as before: the magazine, the sandwich, and the purse beside him; sitting there, reading, eating, and waiting.

"That guy bugs me," Georgie muttered. "I tell you, he bugs me."

His mind worked rapidly. In five minutes he'd thought of a dozen complicated schemes, and discarded them all. As he waxed more desperate, he also became angrier. Center Park was Georgie's domain, and this cop was an intruder. No matter whether he was stupid or not, he still didn't have a right to sit there on that bench and challenge Georgie to come and get him. Well, you could depend on one thing—Georgie was going to go and get him. But how?

Fate came to Georgie's aid at this moment, fate in the form of a girl. She came down the path straight toward their command post behind the hedge, and she was going to pass right by the cop on the bench. Georgie held his breath. Was she tired maybe, looking for a place to sit down? Would she sit on that bench with the cop? Sure enough, she did!

Then a strange pantomime ensued. The girl put her purse down on the bench, opened it, took out a

compact and a lipstick and started working on her makeup. She wasn't paying the least attention to the cop, but he was nervous and fidgety. Finally he settled down, however, and his movements became transparently deliberate. Folding up the magazine, laying it aside, then replacing the half-eaten sandwich in the sack, laying that aside too, he was clearing the decks for action.

"You know what?" Georgie told his cohorts in an excited whisper. "That cop thinks the dame is another one of ours."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the girl on the bench finished with her makeup job and reached toward her purse, which was right next to the decoy purse. Not taking any chances this time, Rosy grabbed the girl's wrist, and she screamed.

Then, at long last, Georgie gave the signal to go into action, and the trio charged out from behind the hedge like cavalry riding to the rescue of the besieged wagon train. A flying wedge, they aimed straight at Rosy, forcing him to release the girl. The struggle was brief and inconclusive, ending in a standoff. Still trying to preserve his disguise, Rosy didn't want to pull his gun and he backed warily away from the fray. The three pursued him with half-steps, just

as wary. Georgie didn't want to signal for the switchblades, because he knew the cop would have a gun. Finally all movement ceased, the opposing sides eyeing and measuring each other.

"Hey, lady," Georgie said over his shoulder without shifting his gaze, "you okay?"

"I think so," the feminine voice answered him with a little quaver.

"You know who this is who grabbed you, lady?" Georgie went on, beginning to grin. "This ain't no dame. He's a man. Besides, he's a cop, pretending to be looking for purse snatchers, only we know now what he's really looking for. He molested you in the park, lady. We three were witnesses, and we'll swear to everything we saw. Will you make the complaint? We'll go find a real cop and have him arrest this guy. How about it, lady? You'd like to see this guy behind bars, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I suppose so . . ."

Still in the wig and the high heels, Rosy waited to hear no more. He turned and ran, a ludicrous figure of defeat, lurching and stumbling and tripping on the high heels, and with both hands trying to hold the wig and the funny little hat on his head.

Georgie didn't run after the vanquished, but sent his derisive laughter in pursuit, an airy mes-

senger of mockery and revenge with a sting sharper than a bullet.

"I don't think he'll be back," Georgie told his henchmen, his grin wider now.

The girl was retrieving the contents of her purse which had spilled onto the sidewalk. She was kind of cute, small and blonde, and from the way she was dressed—Georgie could always tell—she had dough. That fact was obvious, too, in the fat wallet that had spilled from her purse.

Glancing up, the girl found the three looking at her, and she smiled a little uncertainly. Then she said. "I'm glad he got away. I'd just as soon not have to go to the police. But I certainly owe you boys something for rescuing me like you did. You took a real chance. He might have had a gun."

Georgie shrugged. "It wasn't nothing."

The girl, with the strap of her purse slung over her left arm, nervously fingered the wallet. "Would you feel insulted," she went on, "if I gave you all a little present for saving me?"

The three were exchanging covert glances. Then Georgie made a tiny sign with his crooked finger, and Len put a flying block on the girl, knocking her off balance. Georgie grabbed the fat wallet as it flew out of her hands. Then they all ran.

They stopped, though, at the sound of the shot and that feminine voice commanding them, "Halt, or I'll aim lower!"

"That was fun," Rita said. "Maybe I'll apply for the Decoy Squad. Nobody would mistake me for a man."

"They sure wouldn't, sweetie," Rosy agreed with a fond look.

"How about it, Captain Tinker?" Rita persisted.

The Captain scratched his grizzled head. "I always thought our female patrolmen should stay with the school crossings, but now I don't know. Maybe we should send Rosy there."

"Hey!" Rosy protested, and quickly ushered Rita out of the captain's office to excise that idea permanently.

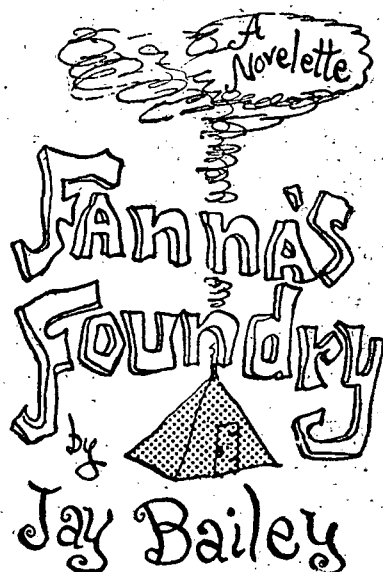








*Immortality cannot always be foretold, for it may come not at all because of one's own fame.*



I WAS a student at an infamous university, which shall remain nameless, and got fed up with the entire scene. As far as I was concerned it was nowhere, man, and I knew about this neat place up north with this fabulous teacher who was one of the greats. I had been prostrated by her work, so I thought why not?

After bidding a happy farewell to the scene I hitchhiked up over California's crazy old Highway

One, all madly flabbergasted with the scenery. I stopped off in Big Sur for a while and saw some of my sculptor type friends, then continued on my merry way with this really crummy sleeping bag and assorted necessities like some little wax sketches for sculpture I hoped to execute someday, cigarettes, another pair of jeans, a T-shirt, socks, and a jar of peanut butter. The grubbier I got the less people gave me a lift, so I ended up walking most of the way.

I'm sort of a split type—I had the beard and I'd smoked the pot and tried the route with LSD, but the truth is, all this jazz seemed too desperate and, well, maybe unobjective. But I've always *really* got turned on by great art. I grovel and cry, and fall on my face. I'm going to be a fine sculptor someday and nothing, but nothing, is going to stop me. I'll do about anything to get there. I don't have any scruples in that direction.

Well, I got to Point Magiway. It's way up north, in the real wildies, and full of these big, hairy Paul Bunyan types. It's a great little vil-

lage and this nice old guy in a little old store told me Fanna's foundry was even *farther* up, so I went on again, slogging along in the fog for a century or two and finally in the early morning I saw it—this house, shooting out over a cliff like the prow of a pirate ship. Too much!

Well, I just stood and stared and *stared*, man. Down below me was the *craziest* beach, covered all over with monster pieces of driftwood—you couldn't even see sand under it, there was so much. Big hunks of junk were rolling around in the waves, crashing together now and then. Seagulls zooped here and there and made seagull noises. Coming from the house I could see what maybe looked like a teeny little old path—that came down the cliff through some twisty old trees, all black-green and dark, and then it got lost in the bushes. Anyhow, I slipped and slid and crashed down the side of the old mountain and finally hit the beach where I pulled off my boots and ran around like some kind of a nut, yelling and whooping, looking at that fantastic wood. It was sculpture *already*. Then I got pretty weak in the knees. I was *there*, and now I felt sort of sick from excitement and hunger, so I yanked my boots on my aching feet and headed toward that house. And whammo! There was a huge, nasty old cave separat-

ing little weak me from the other side. It looked like a big black mouth with fangs, and a current that went real fast skinned into it between a couple of rocks that looked like teeth and here it came out the other side, just as fast. Stuff like seaweed and wood was being pulled into the cave, then the current came out the *other* side, and man, that seaweed and wood wasn't *there*, so I guess all that junk just stayed in there somewhere. It was *spooky*. The only way to get to the other side was to walk on top but it was narrow and looked like a big razor blade sticking up. When the tide was in I guess it got pretty wild, because it was jumping already and the tide was *out*.

Well, I like to live and I'm quite willing to let everyone else enjoy the privilege too, but I'd come this far and I *had* to get up to that house, if only for survival purposes, so I decided to go over that ugly hunk of rock. I went down on my hands and knees and creepy-moused along with the water hoomphing around and underneath, acting like it wanted to *get* me. I was scared cuckoo but I made it across, little old me. Later I found out there was a dirt road to the house that led off the highway farther on, but it was almost as bad; jeeps yes, cars no. Talk

about *isolated*. Fanna's place was practically an island. The village seemed like an awful long way from there, at least on foot.

Anyhow, I got to the other side, saw the path that went up (or down—depends on which way you want to go) so I started up, hoping at least I'd get something to eat before I got kicked out. The sun was shining now, like a big fat omen, but there was a bunch of mean looking fog out to sea and I could hear a foghorn. That house was—I fail for words. I thought Mr. Wright *must* have designed it, but there really was no similarity to any of his stuff—only the grandeur and hugeness. I was so overcome with humility I almost turned around and went back down. I was *grubby*, man, filthy—I even disgusted myself and usually I can put up with a whole lot.

Lands End Cottage, June 12

Early last evening, while sitting at my Victorian desk and feeling a bit blue, I lapsed into an idle contemplation of my own shortcomings, one of which, I sometimes feel, is that of being a woman. When Fanna and I were at the Sorbonne together she was always the leader, the self-sufficient one, and thank heaven for her friendship, for I would never have survived. I suppose I was an excellent sound-

ing board; she is all the things I never was and never can be. She is both a great artist and an inspiring teacher. I do communicate with my students, but I simply don't have the flame she has; however, I do enjoy my job. Fanna is courageous and disciplined and she remains my good friend after all these years. That amazing stoicism! When Fanna's husband disappeared in the treacherous currents below her home recently, she continued her work, although the strain must have been dreadful for her.

In any case, as I sat feeling rather sorry for myself, I happened to glance at the old abandoned house which faces directly toward me from across my backyard and the dirt road beyond. The boarded door stands squarely between two boarded windows; above the door is a small dormer window in which hangs tattered lace curtains which have probably been there since the house was built. Behind this deserted, slightly sinister place lies the Pacific Ocean, often fogbound here. As I looked I saw the curtains move. *No one had lived there for fifty years.* I saw a white face staring out, at least I *thought* I saw it. Then it disappeared. I dismissed it as imagination or a trick of light, but it did snap me out of

my black mood for a while.

"Hey, you there!"

Well, shaking in my tired old boots, skinny as a straw, ol' K. J. Kelly *me*, I looked up and saw this gorgeous red-haired woman waving madly from the big deck.

"Yes, ma'am?" I squeaked.

"Come on up!"

She didn't command me. It was friendly, like hi there, glad ta see ya. I saw some big railroad-tie stairs going up and around to the left through trees, so I followed them, just about ready to faint, what with everything. What was I *doing*?

She was standing on this acre of deck hacking away on a big hunk of wood. Over on the side of the deck was a big old powerful looking winch. She told me later that she hauled the really heavy stuff up from the beach with it. She was about six-three, really tan, with oversized muscles rippling away. Huge!

"Hi!" she greeted me, smiling.

"Yes, ma'am," I gasped, as I looked up at her; I mean *way* up. I'm five-six in my boots with heels. "I sincerely beg your pardon for intruding. I see that you are working and I certainly don't wish to interrupt such a famous artist as you are, so I'll turn around and . . ." I'd pulled my

manners out like a handkerchief and, coming from me, looking like I did, I guess it sounded ridiculous.

This goddess was wearing antique sawed-off jeans, all ravelly, and a pink sweatshirt with the sleeves ripped out. Whackety-whackety whap-hack with her mallet and chisel, and suddenly there was a nose and a cheekbone in the wood. She sure swung a mean mallet.

"Miss, uh, Fanna?" I croaked. I didn't know her last name.

"Yep. I was just about to take a break. Sit down."

"Yes, ma'am." I did as I was told, like I was maybe hypnotized. Meeting the artist of my dreams was turning me into a little tiny kid and I sure didn't look or smell like anything human, but it didn't throw her one bit. She acted like this was the usual thing. I guess that's *real* manners.

"Well, apparently you've been traveling, hmmm?"

"Well, yes, ma'am . . ." I did it again. My mouth came open but absolutely nothing came out.

She said in her soft, low voice, "Come on, tell me your story, Charlie. You don't look too dangerous, and even if you were I rather assume you'd be far too beat to do anything about it." She grinned real wide.



Man, I wouldn't have tried anything with her. She'd probably just pick me up by the scruff of my dirty neck and drop me over the side, casually, go on with her work and not even look down to see where I went.

"Well, yes, and thank you extremely." (I can get pretty suave.)

She gave me a cigarette, which kept me from biting my nails, which I wouldn't have done anyway, believe me, considering the condition they were in. She was really interested, amused and, well, empathic and just plain old wonderful human—*really* concerned. I

figured her for an ancient thirty-two, but her eyes dated back to the Year One—really creepy green, big and slanty and squinty with lots of tiny wrinkles around them, like they'd seen *everything* and could see through *me*.

She kicked aside some wood chips and pinned up a red braid that was dangling down. "Hang on—I imagine you could use a beer."

Ha, and as well, ho! My tongue was hanging out about a foot and my throat felt like I'd swallowed a bucket of sand.

She came back with this lovely cold stuff in a big stoneware pitcher. I found out she threw her own pots—made *all* her dishes and a lot of other stuff she owned. With her pottery she had some weird secret way of combining something that looked like hunks of bone with the clay so it was almost like ivory, mellow and ancient looking. Everything around her was beautiful—simple and big and elegant, like her.

"Very well, mysterious stranger, tell me your name." She sat cross-legged on the deck and just looked at me.

"Kelly."

"Kelly—first or last name?"

"Kelly Kelly, that is, Kelly *John* Kelly."

She didn't laugh. Most people

do, and I don't blame them. My father didn't have much imagination, or maybe too much. Then again maybe he was a sadist and I never knew it.

"How do you do, Kelly John Kelly."

"Yes, ma'am—how do *you* do?" I was getting pretty brave with the beer and she was putting me at ease quite neatly.

"You're the boy who wrote me the letter."

"Yes, Miss Fanna." (Yes indeed—boy, I had written her a letter in a frenzy of adoration after I saw some of her bronzes in the city.)

"Just Fanna. I suppose you've come here to be an apprentice? Many young people do. However, I take on only people with no families to speak of, because sometimes parents are inclined to get irate, you know. Not all mothers and fathers approve of their kids being artists. You'd be surprised how limited some people are." She said the last bit kind of thoughtfully and stared out at the ocean.

"I wouldn't be surprised at all. I *know*." I could finally talk sense, more or less. "No, uh—Fanna. I got nobody, but nobody, just an old uncle who couldn't care less. I'm a black sheep, I guess. Old unk used to send me some money once in a while, but

then he heard I was a "beatnik," whatever that means, and then no more bread, man, and this is one of the several thousand reasons I quit the university. I am nothing but alone, and yes I'd like to study with you—like it *hell*—I walked practically a million miles to get here." After that big long speech I fell back exhausted and threw the rest of the beer down my throat.

She was quiet for a while and looked at me until I squirmed. "Well, that seems to be dedication all right, which is a real point in your favor. If you're strong and energetic and talented and ambitious we'll give it a try and see how it works out."

My little old heart just thumped away. "I thought you only worked in bronze, Miss—'scuse me—Fanna?"

"Oh, that—that's just play." She gestured toward the seven-foot piece of wood. "I experiment all the time, but I prefer bronzes for important exhibits. Sometimes I show my other work, but then one does need loot to keep up a place like this and I get many, many dollars for my bronzes."

I got the point.

"Well, Kelly John Kelly, why don't you sleep here in the sun for a while? I wanted to quit work for a bit anyhow—things to do inside—so nap away happily. You

look as though you might need it."

What with the sun and the beer and the relief, I went to sleep practically that instant. I knew I was safe.

The smell of coffee woke me up that afternoon.

"Hi, sleeping beauty." There she stood, towering over me, wrapped in this great sort of robe and with sandals on her big beautiful feet. "Care for some sustenance?"

Little did she know, but I guess she did because the tray she was holding was *heaped* and it was all I could do to keep from flinging my little self at it and grabbing everything all at once, but I managed to put the brakes on. I just sat up and thanked her and politely chomped away on abalone sandwiches and fresh peaches and olives and cookies. She just lounged there in a big redwood chair and smiled at me in a motherly way as I tucked in several pounds of yummys.

I spent the rest of the afternoon, my eyes hanging out on stems, just looking at the house and the great stuff in it. Everything was so *big*, with a massive rock fireplace that I could walk into. She showed me my room upstairs, with my own bathroom. I looked in the closet, not that I had anything to hang up, and found some man's clothes, a little big for me,

but not uncomfortably too much.

"They are—were—Jerry's, my husband's," she said, "but you may have them. He's gone now." She paused and I didn't say anything. "Incidentally, don't *ever* go swimming down there. Ever! That's how Jerry got it and he was an experienced diver. There's a constant *vicious* undertow and no bodies have ever been found. Sharks too, dear boy—see what I mean?" I saw what she meant.

"Yes indeed, Miss Fanna; yes, oh yes indeedy, I won't ever even go near the place." Brrrrr.

"I don't know who started them, or when, but there are some wild rumors that rum-runners once stashed a great deal of cash in the cave and so fool divers come around occasionally and have a go at it, to their families' sorrow. So you keep away from there. I've been in the cave and have never found anything—just rocks and holes. I keep putting up signs for those idiots and so does the sheriff, but this just eggs people on."

"You've been in that crazy hole?" I gulped. What a woman!

"Sure, I know every shoal and reef and current and rock around here like the back of my hand and, believe me, I am the *only* person who knows how to survive in this water—so just you keep yourself on nice dry land. I don't like to

lose apprentices before it's time for them to go. Understand?" I understood.

Then she left me to get settled in, so I climbed into this big mosaic bathtub and sloshed around and soaked for several years, then I put on my clean jeans and shirt and my old faithful beat-up boots and smelled cooking coming from that great kitchen. I went down, sort of dazed, and she had cooked us this spaghetti thing, but it didn't have any of that tomato jazz—it was somehow made with eggs and cheese and garlic and spices that I couldn't figure out what they were, and we had about a gallon of salad all crisp and green, and home-baked bread, and wine that was so thick you could almost chew it—but ground up grape stems or not it was so *good*—local wine, she said, something like the stuff they have in Greece. I forget the name. We listened to Miles Davis and John Coltrane on this huge stereo and talked a lot, and then I showed her my wax sketches. She seemed really excited about them and, man, did I *glow*! Coming from her, well—Finally I made it upstairs to my soft old bed, shucked off my clothes, burrowed in and bye-bye Kelly John Kelly, sweet dreams.

Land's End Cottage, June 15

Again this evening, on returning from a school board meeting, I saw that face in the old house across the way. My heart pounded, but I threw on my old fur coat, went out through the field, crossed the road and rapped on the front door. The fog had been moving in rapidly and in a few more minutes I wouldn't have seen the figure.

The sheriff was patrolling the little village as he always does during weekends and holidays. Tourists come in searching for antiques, and our small art center is an excellent one, quite well known, so it lures students and collectors and the sheriff makes it a practice to see that everything is orderly. It usually is. Point Magiway is a quiet village and things out of the ordinary seldom occur here. He also frequently stops in for a cup of coffee, as we are old friends and enjoy each other's company.

"Well, girl, just what or who do you expect to find in there?" he grinned. Suddenly I felt like a complete fool, but I explained what I thought I had seen.

"Kids again, probably, so don't get all excited, honey." Then he smiled and said, "How about a cup of coffee for this poor old hard-working sheriff?"

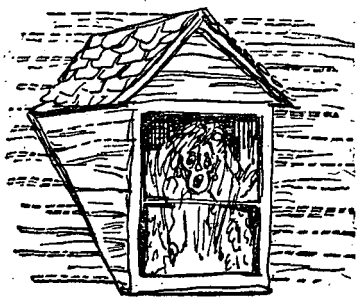
"Of course," I answered, "but it



did seem so real . . ." A coldness was upon me; a feeling of things not *right*. My woman's intuition told me yes; my logic, of course, said no.

The sheriff escorted me home, we had our coffee, and the pleasant company and my cozy, warm cottage cheered me and dissolved that strange feeling.

Robert is a fine and dependable man, one of my few good friends. I'm just glad to know he's around. Sometimes I think he may be as timid as I, about people, that is.



Otherwise he's the bravest, most courageous person in the world. When that little pleasure boat smashed against the rocks down below Fanna's house during a sudden lashing storm last summer, he got there as fast as he could and dove. No bodies were found. Currents are terrible in that spot and Fanna had a screaming fit until he came out of the water. I've never seen her so upset, but I'm glad she was. She undoubtedly saved

his life. Many divers visiting this area are lost there and the cave seems to fascinate them. Fanna actually had been the first in that roiling ocean, as she had been on her deck covering some furniture against the rain and saw the whole tragic accident. Then she called Robert.

When the sea was calmer the next morning she dove again but reported that she had found nothing—only a few bits of wood. The rest of the boat and the people on board had apparently been carried away somewhere by that terrible undertow. A storm can arise from nowhere here and furiously pound our part of the coast, then cease as quickly as it began. The shoreline is deceptive because of its breathtaking beauty. Hidden in the splendor of the rocks and beneath the incredible green and blue of the water lie savagery and treachery. Signs are posted periodically, but I suppose it is the nature of adventurous tourists to disregard signs. They often steal them and I suspect a few college dorms are plastered with warnings reading **DANGER! TREACHEROUS CURRENTS and ABSOLUTELY NO SWIMMING!** I can visualize the last one hung in a shower room somewhere. I once was a student, too, but that seems so long ago.

Tomorrow night I'm invited to Fanna's for dinner to meet her new protege. She called today and told me that he has a few wax sketches which show great promise.

I'm rather tired and the fire has gone out and fog has come in. There seems to be more of a chill in the air than usual.

That extraordinary apparition at the dormer window! I do wish I could erase it from my mind.

Wow, man, I, KJK, yours truly with boots, slept like a, pardon the expression, log. Man, my first night at Fanna's. Fine, fine, utterly fine.

I tippy-toed down that morning and everything was all warm and the fire was still smoldering. I slunk into the kitchen and found a note from Fanna telling me to help myself to breakfast, which I did without further ado. I may be little, but I'm *hungry*. Bacon and eggs and toast and coffee and orange juice and marmalade and milk and cold ham and a couple of sausages and a slab of berry pie was my repast.

After I had wolfed down this little snack, to sort of get me going, I went in the livingroom and looked out through the glass wall and the fog was there, thick and wet and mysteriosoville. The

house was like a castle perched on the mist.

I decided to explore the outside, having nothing else to do. In back there was this huge pyramid without any windows, the foundry yet, and goofy noise came from inside and smoke out the top. I quietly opened the door and got it slammed right in my face.

"Not NOW!" she roared.

I had made a boo-boo. I was pretty ashamed of myself, so I just slunk away and started to poke around. There was a big cement block freezer-house which looked like a fortress and had a giant padlock. I found out she went to the village for supplies only every few months. I guess she had enough stuff on that estate to last a whole platoon of people for a year. Inside another building was all the junk that supplied the power for everything. I climbed up to the tippy-top of this neat water tower and looked out all over the place. The fog had lifted enough for me to see a great big old freighter way out there and, man, I felt like Fletcher Christian. Then I came down and messed around in the nasturtiums and geraniums and picked some berries and climbed a few trees and met Churl, her dirty old dog, who scared the pants off of me. He was *big*. Fanna had told me he liked to bite people and

even bit her once in a while, so I steered clear of him. Eeny, Meany, Miney and Yours were the cross-eyed Siamese cats and completely demented, but they were friendlier—not much though.

Well, I generally made myself un-useful wandering in and out and up and down, sometimes in fog and sometimes sunshine—it kept changing like mad—which made it even better, with stuff whooshing around in the sky all the time. I mean, the place was *active*. Life here was going to be the essence of essence.

Finally Fanna came out, all sweaty and pleased with herself, smiling a big smile (she must have had forty teeth—great big white ones).

“Sorry, Kelly, but when I’m in there *never* disturb me. I’m always in the middle of something fairly crucial and a piece could be ruined. I didn’t mean to be rude.”

I just hung my head—what a kinky thing to do—I should have known better. But she saw how stupid dumb I felt and clapped me on the back, damn near knocking the breath out of me.

“Don’t suffer, child. Forget it. Everything turned out fine, just fine,” she said.

We went in the house, sat down at the huge round kitchen table, and she said, “Now, Kelly John,

I’ve had no help for a bit, so things are in disrepair. Here’s a list of jobs I want you to do. Let’s see you prove your worth, little buddy. Then, if you’re OK, we’ll get down to some really serious work, but as you can see, this place is practically self-sustaining and everything must be kept in tip-top shape or all goes down the drain.”

It was stuff like repairing fences and varnishing decks and hauling wood up from the beach and this and that, but I could see what she meant about proving my worth. I looked pretty puny and bronze casting isn’t for people who look like “before” pictures, so I figured this would be a great time for me to put on a muscle or two. For her I’d do anything.

“Now, let’s have a drink and I’ll start to fill you in about casting.”

From 3:30 on she explained, very carefully, all kinds of sculpture processes—the ins and outs and dangers—stuff I *never* knew. She sure had her own tricks. What a wizard! Then, when she saw I was getting google-eyed and suffering from advanced tired brain she laughed and said, “OK, work done for the day. It was a splendid day, too.” This last she kind of mumbled to herself.

I was practically having a nervous breakdown to see her new

bronze—it was the last one for a new show in the city—but by then I'd learned that she was boss and did not ever doubt it for an instant.

Well, it started to get dark and this friend of hers came in—an art teacher from the village, sort of small and not too pretty and not too bad, not real young but not old either, with soft brown hair and pretty eyes and the sweetest smile I've ever seen. She was kind of rabbit, but not too much to be yecch, you know, just sort of—well, lady-like and nice. She was wearing jeans and a coat that looked like old police-dog fur, but outside of that she was definitely OK. Trustworthy, like I could go to her if I ever got in trouble and she'd help. Where I guess Fanna was all fire and Mother Earth and genius, this other chick was more like a big-sister type, but *very* aware, not syrup and goo by any means. She had a good, sharp mind and knew just about everything about art history. I was feeling ignoranter by the minute. My oh my, was there lots I didn't know about my Chosen Field, but I guess I really started learning then.

"The new bronze is good, it's damned good," Fanna finally said. It was the first time she'd mentioned it.

We were in the kitchen having

martinis and we were getting loose and leading up to some fine conversation, I could tell. What's-her-name was stirring something glorious in a big iron pot and I was just about drooling, what with one thing and another. We got talking and I mostly listened at first, but I started coming up with some ideas of my own and they listened—they really *listened* to me. Anybody else probably would have thought I was so far out in left field I'd *never* be back.

Fanna got quiet again and then, when we were eating this wild bouillabaise and hunks of French bread about a foot thick, all drippy with butter, Fanna said, "Well, Kelly John Kelly, I've definitely decided. You may stay until you learn your craft. I think you are much more original and determined than anyone who has been here so far—even Jerry." Her voice dropped a notch or two and then she sort of murmured, "I thought he had it, but he didn't—allowed things to upset him. Interfered with our work."

*What things?* I wondered, but man, I flipped anyhow. Here it was, right in my lap—probably the best sculptor in the whole world for a teacher and this house, and just everything. Now you must get it straight. There was no romantic bit, ever, with me. Who can fall in

love with a giant? I just did four times as much as she asked and followed her around like a little old puppy, hoping some of that genius would drift over in my direction.

The evening was really great and I felt so jazzed I almost couldn't stand it. I finally hauled upstairs and in my fat old bed I drifted away, trailing clouds of glory.

Land's End Cottage, June 17

Young Kelly John Kelly is extremely talented. He has scope, sensitivity and a wonderfully unique and adventurous mind. He seems to be a true original. However, I'm sure he's not aware of it. I was most impressed with his enthusiasm and a rather clean quality, in spite of the scraggly, boyish beard. Although he talks much like some of the extraordinary young people who sometimes come through the village, it seems to be merely a surface affectation and possibly rather defensive. He can't be more than eighteen, if that.

Fanna does help these young people enormously. They all leave eventually for Europe or Mexico or South America for either more study or to attempt to make their marks in the world. I hope to hear from them someday. Several promised they'd write, but they haven't as yet.

I look often at that dormer window, but it has been foggy and so I have seen nothing so far. However, I'm almost certain something is wrong over there. I'm tempted to go look for myself, but I guess I don't possess the courage.

Fanna has invited Robert and me to dinner two weeks from now. We will be the first to see her completed show!

Man, the next day I started the work at Fanna's. I know I'm pretty runty but I managed fairly well. Hauling the big wood was the roughest. That stuff is *heavy*. That wasn't so bad, but it was carrying it along the rocks above that stupid cave that gave me the holy shudders. However, yours truly, the non-muscle wonder, started combing the beach for likely looking materials. When I found a driftwood goody I'd stagger with it over the top of the cave and mash it onto that wicked looking meat-hook that always hung down. Then I'd zap up to the deck, turn on the electric jazz that hauled the wood up, then, dear friends, I, *me*, swung the whole works onto the deck, undid it, wrestled it around to the back where I dumped it on a big pile of hunks of marble and very, very select pieces of wood and then I'd collapse for a while. Sometimes Fanna'd look at a chunk sort

of, well, not in a friendly way and raise her eyebrows at me as if to say, 'Oh you stupid ass, that's nothing,' so I'd pick it back up and stagger inside to the fireplace with it. Driftwood sure burns fine—with lots of crackle and pop. What with all the physical type work and the food—oh man, the *food*—I started to get a muscle here and there. I finally got so I could practically *skip* over the top of that cave, and that took some doing. Sometimes, when I didn't find good stuff I'd climb back up the winch cable instead of going around, just for the hell of it. I'd always let the winch right down again after a haul so it would be ready and waiting for the next trip.

I sure would have liked to go swimming, but there was no place around here. I'm really a neat swimmer, but I didn't tell her—she really laid it on about me keeping out of the water, so I figured who needs swimming when I have everything else? And did I eat! Chicken and roast beef and strawberry pie with whipped cream and fresh crab and salmon steaks and abalone fried in butter—I growl, I salivate. Fanna got all of the seafood herself and I almost had a heart attack when I first saw her disappear in that mean looking water, but the lady knew what she was doing, oh most definitely.

I've got two pieces almost finished—wood stuff two and three feet high and it's coming out OK so far, but man, I've got a long way to go. I can't *contain* myself—it's like I was high all the time on plain old love for the whole mother world!

Land's End Cottage, June 20

There is someone in that house! I know there is! As I drove home from school today in the rain I thought about the old place. I'm a rather timid woman, but nevertheless I decided to investigate for my own peace of mind.

In the back of the house is a rickety staircase which leads to the upstairs where there is a little door. I parked and, in my old slicker, I went through the mud and weeds to see for myself. I climbed the wet stairs to be absolutely sure, but all was secure. When I heard what I thought might be crying on the other side of the wall, but I wasn't at all sure. I grasped the shaky railing but felt the old wood give under the pressure. I hammered on the wall, but the summer storm was turning into a fury and any sound I made was drowned out. The railing and the little porch were not to be trusted and it was obvious I could no longer stay there safely, so I went back down the stairs and fought my way to my

car through the slashing rain. Soaked, I came home and called Robert at his office, but the janitor answered and told me a fishing boat had been battered against the horrible cave below Fanna's and the sheriff was on his way there. Why, *why*, can't something be done about that murderous spot?

Well, man, I finally cast my first piece with Fanna's help. I did I did I did! Yours truly, KJK, is now a sculptor, with bronze yet! It's a gull. The model was a fresh-dead one I found on the beach and it turned out so *groovy*. Fanna wanted me to cast the real gull itself instead of a wax image of it, but I didn't want to play around. I wanted it to be my original—mine, mine, mine. It isn't a *real* looking gull—I changed it around quite a bit—maybe it's the spirit of gull, or something like that. Fanna helped me mount the finished work on a little marble base—beautiful! It's weird and sort of sad to know that the original wax model you do is burned out—lost forever. See, you put plaster around the finished wax model (this could be done with the real gull, too, but it seems like cheating) and you leave a little hole at the top of the plaster mold and another one at the bottom. Then you pour this molten bronze—*melted*, man, and that takes lots

of *heat*. I was scared silly, like if I got any on me my old flesh would just burn away, but it turned out dandy. Then the wax dribbles out the bottom of the mould as the



bronze goes in, then the whole works is whirled and whirled around in this machine thing and the bronze slowly hardens, and gets into every little nook and cranny inside that old plaster. Well, what you did in wax is now bronze. Follow me? Then when it's all cooled down you crack off the plaster, and it's like Christmas! A real, genuine, authentic honest-to-God bronze sculpture sits there, just like your original wax, but *permanent*. And your original wax thing is gone—

just gone—up in smoke and gone.

Rodin and Michelangelo and Kelly John Kelly! That old bird's wings sort of fanned out and he was ready to *fly*. We put my gorgeous, my beautiful sculpture on the rock mantelpiece next to a bronze head of Fanna's and there it sits in all its glory. You know, I don't think she ever *sleeps*? I'm always the first to go to bed, all tucked out, and when I get up she's tearing around somewhere.

Hey, a boat bashed itself in the storm—down on the cave. Fanna went down in her wet suit and jumped in the water, but me, I just simply sat by the fire and thought of other things. Dead people give me the whim-whams. As a matter of fact she wouldn't *let* me come down. She figures I'm too young and tender for such stuff and she's absolutely right. As a matter of fact she's got to know *exactly* where I am every second, and I love it. Big Mama.

Land's End Cottage, July 5

Robert escorted me to the dinner party, which was perfectly wonderful. Our first surprise was Kelly John's bronze. It's a delightful little thing of a gull but, as Fanna does, he has reassembled the parts so that it's a new dimension, although his work is not as realistic as hers. Almost all of her bronzes

are done in this manner—the figures are human, but the individual parts of the body are rearranged—where they wouldn't ordinarily be. It may sound a trifle morbid, but it isn't at all when one views the finished work. She is such a consummate artist that everything she does is wonderful, although I'm sure no one else in this world could pull the trick off successfully.

Fanna's dinner was superb, as usual, and after brandy and coffee she announced that it was time to see her new sculptures. She took us to the foundry and snapped on the lights and what a breathtaking sight! There were mermaids, tritons and Poseidon himself, the forms again rearranged, yet the musculature, viewed section by section, was perfect. All were covered with kelp and sea-creatures. A little mermaid with four arms (I know it sounds strange, but it worked) floated gracefully, and the suggestion was of an octopus. In each of her delicate hands she held a little fish. Her wet-looking hair poured over her shoulders and each scale of the lower part of the body was perfect. Her mouth was open, neck cords straining; her eyes were closed and she seemed to be singing. Perhaps one of the sirens? Poseidon towered beside her, holding in his arms a drowned sailor. The work was shocking, disturb-



ing and pure magic. The wonderful golden patina—she uses manganese bronze, which is the most beautiful of all—the strength of the sea-god; we were overwhelmed. She had them all covered with tarps, and this was Kelly John's first glimpse of them, too. That dear boy, he couldn't speak for several minutes, and then he cried and ran into the house. He's so very sensitive. If I had married, I might have a son now—oh well. It was a rare privilege to view a collection that would soon be world famous. But the evening ended with tragedy.

Robert drove me home. He started a fire and was putting the coffee pot on as I began to close the shutters. *And then I saw him again.* Moonlight struck the window of the house across the way; the lace curtains and ghostly white face were clearly visible. I gasped and pointed, speechless. Robert rushed to my side and he too saw. He grabbed my big flashlight and together we dashed through the field to the back window, climbed in and ran up the stairs.

In the harsh beam of the light, crouched in a corner, his cheek bones poking out like hatchet blades, was Jerry. This pitiful wreck of a creature scabbled to us on his knees, babbling almost unintelligibly, as Robert put his strong arm about me—I know I

almost fainted from the shock.

"I'm afraid—so cold—I waved and waved—fog and rain and you didn't see—you didn't—canned food here, see?" He began to sob wrackingly. "Oh God, the people in the boats—she *got* them, in the cave, terrible—and the kids she worked with, never come back, they'll never—I hid in the cave, you know, I got hurt—she hurt me, but I got out—I—I—"

Those were the last words he uttered. It was as though he had hung to a shred of sanity until help came. Jerry's brief span of years in what we think of as the rational world now ended for the rest of his days. He then took my hand, smiling, eyes blank, and allowed himself to be led to my house like a little child. We bundled him in blankets and Robert carried to the car the skeleton that had once been a man and we drove him to the hospital, twenty miles away.

We decided to wait until the next day to tell Fanna. How awful for her. Her personal artistic triumph would be sadly dimmed now by what would undoubtedly be grief and shock. Everyone had known that for some months Jerry had been suffering with a private agony of his own and was obviously on the brink of mental and emotional disaster. He was a gentle soul and

gifted, but something, somewhere in his shadowy life had gone desperately wrong, eventually destroying him, forcing him back into the shadows forever.

The next day we tried to tell Fanna as kindly as we could, but we could not change the painful truth. Fanna stood rigid and kept demanding, "What did he say? *What did he say?*"

Robert explained slowly, for she was obviously so shocked she could no longer listen. "Fanna, hear me out! *He babbled nonsense.* He has to be taken care of like a baby—Fanna, he is *unreachable*. He has gone into what the doctor says is a catatonic state and there's little or no hope for him. All I can figure is that the terror of his experience in the water did it—apparently he got trapped in the cave, but he got himself out somehow and ran blindly to the village—why, we'll probably never know. His mind must have snapped. Then I suppose he remembered the old house and thought he'd be safe from whatever nightmare hallucinations plagued the poor guy. The house was dry and empty and he must have been so afraid of his own imagination that he just wanted to hide. Enough to drive that poor scared guy around the bend."

The color slowly came back to Fanna's face and she sat, heavily.

Poor Kelly John looked so stricken. I saw tears in his eyes as he turned and stared into the fireplace.

We talked for a long time and gradually Fanna began to function again. She made several decisions. She will postpone her exhibit, close her house and go to Greece until she feels able to work. She will give enough money to Kelly John for him to attend the art center, and he will live in the little apartment at my home which I occasionally rent out to students. She really believes in this boy—more so it seems than she did her other students, and so do I. I gave Kelly John the key to my place then and there. What a shame for both of them this had to happen. We offered to help her close down her home, but she firmly said no; she and Kelly John assured us they could manage together. She wanted him to leave with us then, but he absolutely refused, and was most definite about it. He is really very strong and devoted to Fanna. Her place is almost inaccessible when the great gates at the end of the road are closed, and she plans to blast the cave, cutting off the only other entrance, so everything should be safe. Robert will keep an eye on it for her.

I'm afraid the strain has been a bit too much for me, too. I live a rather sheltered life and finding my old friend Jerry like that—it

gave me a glimpse into a hell which, I suppose, could happen to any of us.

A few days later I thought I saw a figure at the dormer window again, beckoning. It was then I decided to take a short holiday. Someone can substitute for me at school for a few days. I plan to go to the city, visit a few galleries, the theatre, and try to forget the terrible sadness to which I had been a witness. I'll ask Robert to board that dormer window while I'm gone.

*Man, what kind of a ghoul is that Fanna?* I've been crying for hours, though I tell myself, "Kelly John, get a hold on yourself," but it's no use. I'm sick—oh man—that freezer house! No wonder she kept it locked. All I wanted to do was to help her carry stuff and move junk and like that, just being *helpful*, and then she came at me with that bloody meat cleaver, but not in time for me to miss everything in there. Man, that knife was *dripping*! I guess she was going to get rid of everything (ugh) before she left. Anyhow, I interrupted her. I yelled like a banshee and took off. Thank God for new muscles. If she hadn't tripped over Churl and if he hadn't glommed onto her leg I'd be hanging on the wall there, on a big hook, along

with all those others—some of them didn't look much older than me—all frozen stiff and really dead, like for how long? I hated that dog, but he sure as hell saved *this* cat's neck. Man, it isn't real, but it *happened*. It truly honestly *happened*! I guess I'm still sane, but I'm not real sure yet.

Like I said, I like to live and I'm pretty fast on my feet. Man, I *flew* to that old winch and went down the cable like lightning, then over the top of the cave and swoosh, up the mountain. I looked over my shoulder from the top of the hill and here she came, her leg all bloody, running like a big lunatic antelope, still carrying that bloody cleaver. I kept flying and got into the big trees on the other side of the road. Man, I dodged and zigged and zagged and then I remembered that when I was a little old kid and we played hide 'n seek, I used to hide in a tree and nobody ever found me. People just don't think of looking *up*, so I got to this tall old fir tree and I shinnied up, man, like a monkey and I made myself *part* of that tree. I was scratched and bloody and covered with sap, but I was *there*. If she found me I'd be scattered all over everywhere, but at least she couldn't sneak up on me or tackle me. I was breathing real hard, but it was kinda windy and those old

branches were nice and thick and shadowy. Well, I just glued myself there and here she came, waving that meat cleaver, looking everywhere. Her long red hair was flying around in the wind and her leg was all chomped and bloody and her eyes were popping straight out of her face. Man, I prayed and prayed, and she never looked up, not even once. Then she whanged down with the cleaver on my tree and I thought she was gonna chop it down, but that ghastly knife just quivered there. She left it stuck and took off and ran back to the house like devils were after her.

It wasn't dark yet, so I stayed where I was. Pretty soon here she came again, lickety-split, heading toward the village in her jeep, but I didn't want to go down until good old night arrived. I didn't know what she had planned in that horrible head of hers—I didn't want to think of all the loose bolts rattling around in there. She couldn't *tell* anybody, that's for sure. All she could do would be find me quick and mincemeat me up and put me wherever it is she puts the leftovers.

Well, finally it got nice and dark, but what was I gonna do? It had to be something and mighty quick. So I started on my little feet toward the village, staying in the good old trees all the way, and

stopped about a half mile from town. I *knew* she was waiting, parked between the two turn-offs into Point Magiway, because that's what I would have done. She knew me well enough to be pretty sure I'd go for the sheriff instead of heading for the hills, which I began to think was what I should have done, but if I had she would have found me sooner or later. Yeah, she's dedicated, OK, to anything she does, and she *always* gets it done, one way or another. *But this time she wasn't gonna make it.* Kelly John Kelly may be a kid, but he likes to remain around.

I crossed the highway, went straight down the cliff, took off my beloved old boots and my worn-out jeans and hit the water and, man, I *swam* the rest of the way. I knew exactly where that old house was because it was the only one on the point. With the little bit of moonlight I could see enough, but I near froze stiff. I'm still shivering and I've got these lousy, dirty old blankets around me. I went up that cliff and into that nutty old house where they found Jerry. I figured she wouldn't think I'd be dumb enough to go *there* but sheesh! *What if she did?*

Anyhow, here I am, still in one piece, surprisingly enough. I would have gone to the art-teacher's, but

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what if old crazy-face got there first and told her some cockamamie story? And I didn't want to be *seen*, man, and the sheriff's was way on the other side of the village. Anyhow, I sort of passed out for the rest of the night, what with everything.

Next day I waved and waved across the way, but that art teacher just looked right through me and closed her shutters. Fine friend. Maybe I'm a ghost already—I'm not real sure about anything right now. Then she took a couple of suitcases, put them in her car and just peeled out.

I just hope I can get my gull back. OK, so I'm *crying*. The first bronze I ever did, and it's being contaminated. I didn't think I had any scruples, but about this I got *scruples*.

I know the sheriff's gonna drive by sometime today, but *when*? He's always all over the place, from what he said. Come on, sheriff baby, *come on*! Man oh man, oh manaroonian, here comes his car. I'm gonna break this old window and yell and holler and throw cans down—but not until that nice old guy gets right up *here* below me with his nice old *gun* at his side. Maybe that lunatic broad is watching from somewhere. Well, let her watch! That sheriff's gonna get an earful. I just hope he doesn't take me away like he did that poor kook of a husband of hers. Man, let him believe me, please let him *believe* me—I'm just a kid, so he's gotta listen.

I always wanted to be represented in a big old gallery, but by my *work*, not *me*!

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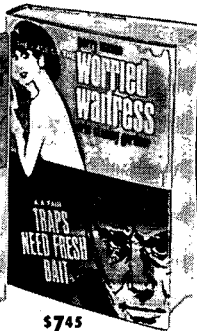
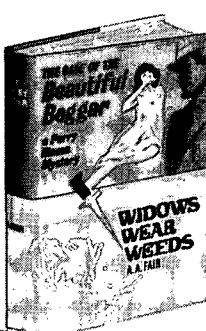
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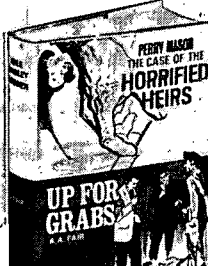
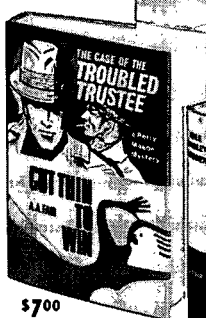
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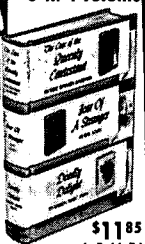
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